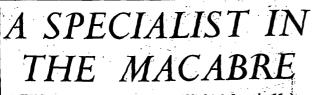
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KISS, KISS. By Roald Dahl. (Michael Joseph! 15s.)

By H. E. BATES

Wales, served as a fighter meat-canning—and what meat! pilot in the R.A.F., is married —in "Pig," and the care of to the actress Patricia Neal, is infants in "Royal Jelly." Among a connoisseur of wine, furni- the nastier and more ingenious ture and painting, grows old- of the pieces is a little thing fashioned rose species, bets called "Edward the Conqueror," much on horses and now spends which may be safely likened to much on horses and now spends half his time in this coun-try and half in America; and it is perhaps this international quality in his make-up that gives his short stories their most immediately obvious charac-teristic, that of being highly cos-mopolitan. The peculiar flavours in, "Kiss, Kiss" will find ready palates in London, New York, Paris, Rome and even, Ishouldn't wonder, Moscow. Already in fact, and not surprisingly, New Yorkers have taken the stories to their hearts. to their hearts.

My younger daughter as a small child wrote a charm-ing story called "Stewed George." If only she had deve-loped her talents in that direction she might, by this time, have rivalled Mr. Dahl, for it is in precisely such subjects as stew-ning George that Mr. Dahl excels. He is in fact a humorist whose prime speciality, in the contemprime speciality, in the contem-porary manner, is the macabre. Many of his subjects are quite revolting, some are merely diabolically ingenious, others just plain nasty; but nearly all are very funny.

* *

IT is difficult to define his de-It is dimicult to define his de-lightful talent and particular achievement in a few words, but anyone familiar with the work of the American cartoonist Charles Addams will understand me per-fectly when I say that Mr. Dahl is, to my mind, a sort of Charles Addams of literature. "Now is, to my mind, a sort of Charles Addams of literature. "Now Kick Daddy Goodnight and Run off to Bed" has long been a favourite Addams caption of mine, and in the years to come stories such as "William and Mary." will have an honoured place beside it. This horrible little masterpiece is quite the nastiest, if not the funniest, of the lot. the lot.

"Kiss, Kiss" belongs to that category of fiction whose plots cannot be revealed; it would spoil all the gruesome fun to do spoil all the gruesome fun to do so. Much of the effect of these stories depends wholly on sur-prise, and a good deal of the hoodwinking is done by the meticulous parade of what

M. ROALD DAHL is Nor- appears to be highly specialised wegian by parentage, was knowledge, surgery being the born and brought up in subject in "William and Mary," which may be safely-likened to another masterpiece in revul-sion, Dunsany's 'Two Bottles of Relish."

> * * IN "Pig" a boy has just per-formed the ceremony of burying his grandmother at the bottom of the garden, and a subsequent brief conversation between him and the local doctor, who is surprised by the lady's demise, will give a fair example of Mr. Dahl's method:

une coctor ašked: "Six or seven feet: down, I should think." "And how long ago?" "Oh! About eight hours." "Then she's dead." the doctor announced. "Here's the certifi-cate."

One final word of warning. Someone once said that you cannot live for ever on quince jelly (it might just as well have been (it might just as well have been royal jelly, for that matter). In other words, any attempt to gollop "Kiss, Kiss" will; in my view, result in mental bilious-ness. Mr. Dahl belongs very much to the take-one-at-night school: or at the outside, two. Savoured in this way "Kiss, Kiss" will give considerable delight to those who like their short stories astringent and sophisticated, diabolically in-genious, shamelessly unconven-tional and all wrapped up with a lovely leer. lovely leer.

Brief Deaths

A COMPANION TO MURDER. A COMPANION TO MURDER. By E. Spencer Shew. (Cassell. 25s.) Notorious murderers—Crippen and Ruxton, Haigh and Christie—rub shoulders with eminent judges and advocates—Mr. Justice Avory, Patrick Hastings—in this dic-tionary of notable murders of the first fifty years of the century. Mr. Shew's loag career as a Lobby Cor-respondent was preceded by a spell as a reporter during which he him-self was present at a number of the trials he describes, and about which he writes with gusto.