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## BOOKS OF THE

## NEW FICTION

Miss Storm Jameson's Very  
Queer, Very Good Novel

By H. E. BATES

**The Moon is Making.** Storm Jameson. (Dassell. 8s. 6d.)**No Pockets in a Shroud.** Horace McCoy. (Arthur Barker. 7s. 6d.)**A Matador Dies.** Joseph Peyré. (Geoffrey Bles. 7s. 6d.)**The Faithful Compass.** Doreen Wallace. (Collins. 7s. 6d.)

THE MEANING of Miss Jameson's strange title, which belongs, in fact, to a strange but fine book, is not made clear until page 102. The following conversation, which also throws some light on the book's setting, then takes place:

"The moon is making," said Handel.

"I don't know what that means," Andrew said. He felt ashamed.

"Why it means that it is waxing towards the full. You know, they say that when the moon is making, queer people behave more queerly than usual," he added slyly.

"Wik is full of mad people," Andrew said.

Wik is a small northern fishing town, which began as a Friar's settlement. It is in some ways an outlandish, in some ways parochial settlement, but above all independent. Its people exhibit the same contrary characteristic, and almost all of them are of a fierce, contemptuously individual and almost crazy nature. They delight in hurling themselves against the accepted rules of life; at the same time they are wretchedly narrow, fiercely parochial in their capacity for small feuds. They are people who would dominate, but are themselves dominated.

As to what dominates them I am not sure. Nor do I think Miss Jameson has made it clear. The major fault, in fact, almost the only fault of her book, is her failure to afford us some opportunity of contrasting these slightly mad, highly individual people with someone not of their blood and passion. These people live, as her publishers point out, and unmistakably live, "by the fierce light of their own impulses, desires, hates, loves." It might have been better if they had lived by some illumination from the outer world.

## Excommunicate

This is mere speculation. It would be miserable criticism to chastise Miss Jameson not for what she has done but for what she might have done. Her novel is an intense, flaming piece of work, conceived with heat and imagination but controlled in its shaping by a cool, at times almost cold, intelligence. Since it is a novel which stands or falls primarily by the force of its characters and not by the charm of any well ruled out plot, it seems to me useless to try to describe its story. The whole book is dominated by Handel Wicker, excommunicated (as near as matters) prelate, scholar, individualist, who stubbornly huris himself against the world in a conscientious but slightly crazy effort to change it. This absorbing character dominates the reader as he dominates the book. But what is really delightful about Miss Jameson's book, and to a fellow-writer especially, is the quality of her writing. Simple, austere, beautifully flexible, it is the medium of a mature, richly-endowed, conscious artist. The imprint of her mind is as deeply impressed on the pages of this book as the personality of her astonishing characters.

## They Shoot Men

From this strange, mystical, not-easy-to-read book, it is a long jump to Mr. Horace McCoy. Mr. McCoy is the man who wrote "They Shoot Horses, Don't They?" and his new book, of which one of the lessons is that they shoot human beings, don't they, too, is a brilliant example of the fast-moving, high-powered postman-rings-twice school. Indeed, it would not surprise me at all if, in the near future, Mr. McCoy made the postman ring three times. He is an astonishingly, and it may be to English readers, shockingly blunt writer, with neither time nor words to waste.

His story is of a young newspaperman, handsome, and in private life a concealed philanthropist, who desires to expose the rackets of an American city. Thrown out of his job, he borrows money, starts a magazine, and proceeds to print stories so damning that the town is set alight. Powerful influences work against him, endeavouring to smash the magazine, and subsequently to buy it up. When he refuses and then exposes the activities of a despicable secret society of respectable American citizens, it is time to observe, yet again, that they shoot human beings, don't they, too?

Sober criticism of a book like this, it occurs to me, is useless. Either this book hits you or it doesn't. It hits me, and it hits me very hard. It is like the kick of a mule in the solar plexus.

## Bullfighters—and Others from Stock

"A Matador Dies" is the story of a decaying bull-fighter. The book, which has been awarded the Prix Goncourt, naturally compels comparison with Ernest Hemingway, who in "The Undeclared" set down for good and all almost the same story, using the minimum of words to gain the maximum of effect. Indeed, if M. Peyré's book shows anything at all—and I am not sure if it would have made much difference if his hero had been a footballer, a baseball player or a boxer—it shows that the "Undeclared" is a 22 carat story. This is another way of saying that, though I do not doubt M. Peyré's integrity, capabilities, or his acquaintance with the bull-fight, the fate of his Ricardo, the once great artist, does not move me. It interests me, and I am aware that, with a compulsive wife, an insistent mistress, a dying reputation, and a hostile public, he is in a tough spot. But I have no tears to shed. Perhaps we have been asked to shed too many tears over dying bull-fighters; or it may be that, if we have tears to shed, they are for another Spain.

In a way I would class Miss Wallace's "The Faithful Compass" with M. Peyré's book. Here, again, there is no questioning the integrity, the ability, and the all-round knowledge of the writer. But what are we offered? Here, as in the other book, a collection of stock figures: the match-making lady of title, the country doctor, the rich young man paring rapidly with his money, a young lady whose knowledge of the amorous preliminaries, not to speak of the "ultimate demands," reads like something out of a Sunday school prize. The scene in Cumberland: the descriptions are charming. But the people moving against that charming background have a close relation, it seems to me, to dead mutton.

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