The Stout English

***"The Feast of July," by H. E. Bates** (Little, Brown. 246 pp. $3.50), is the story of a girl named Bella who has a catalytic effect on a family she joins, and particularly the three brothers who belong to it.*

By Oliver LaFarge

ONE may roughly generalize that in the past English writing about the lower classes was from above downwards. Dickens, who knew and cared about his subjects, caricatured them or enlarged them to display them to their betters. H. G. Wells was perhaps the first writer of consequence to treat the lower classes from the inside. He was consciously, if not self-consciously, identified with them, but even he got up on an intellectual ladder to watch them, and shouted at the bourgeoisie to come and look.

Novels such as H. E. Bates's "The Feast of July" descend from Wells on the one hand, on the other from the Arcadian, localistic, rural tales with which British writing has always been beset. This one tells a forthright tale about a small number of working people who are seen as persons in their own right. The telling is without condescension and is kept always within the point of view, the frame, of the characters themselves.

If the British develop a school of this kind of writing about the unquaint poor, the extremely poor, it will differ markedly from the existing American school. It will resemble neither "Tobacco Road" nor "The Grapes of Wrath." We assume that poverty is not a sin, but a wrong, an offense upon its victims, and must lead to rootlessness, loss of self-respect, and instability if not to degradation. Perhaps in America this is true.

—G. Scott Bushe.

H. E. Bates—"richly dramatic."

IF EXISTING British writing can be believed (and anyone who was in London during the Battle of Britain will be ready to believe it) the mass of the British poor retain the strong self-respect, the customs, the stability that are the strength of a nation. They may go hungry on occasion, but they mind both their manners and their morals, and no one can push them around. Hence writers do not condole with them or yearn over them. They tell about them, not without admiration, and if the telling will help towards the ultimate elimination of poverty so much the better.

The structure of this story is dramatic and effective. The central character, Bella, is a sympathetic and credibly unusual young woman who is projected into a family, the members of which are individuals in their own rights. She acts as a reagent to bring out their various characters. Particularly she affects the three brothers, each of whom loves her in his manner and according to his capabilities.

The story is full of hardships and is richly dramatic. It ends with melodrama and partial tragedy, arising out of Bella's commonplace past—commonplace in the eyes of others, but never commonplace to the protagonist, as the author skilfully makes clear. It is not, however, in the least depressing. One can read this book as a social study, as a plain novel, or as both, with satisfaction.

Notes on a Margin

By Doris Peel

HOT of heart
cold of mind—
this a goblin's
gift you'll find.

Happy he
gracely blessed—
with blaze in brain
ice in breast.

* * *

Bold the bloom
sprung from tomb,
and from pyre
bright the fire.

Out from sealed
sightliest yield:
proudest plumed—
he consumed.

Disenchanted Lives

***"Moonscape and Other Stories," by Mika Waltari** (translated by Naomi Walford. G. P. Putnam's Sons. 310 pp. $3.50), brings together five short tales with modern settings by the Finnish writer best known to Americans as author of "The Egyptian."*

By James Kelly

IN "Moonscape," a collection of five contemporary stories, Mika Waltari moves with surprising (to this onlooker) agility from the ponderous splendor of "The Egyptian" and the panoplied derring-do of four other sixteenth-century historical novels. If Naomi Walford's translation captures the true quality of these Finnish originals one must conclude that Mr. Waltari's taproot is the same which fed Flaubert and Dickens. For here is the misanthropic idea, the unsparing portrayal of degeneracy, the morose exploration of human dilemmas from which there can be no escape. It's a black mood which sweeps the reader along by the cumulative effect of narrated details. And the principal protagonists of each story—always an evil woman pitted against a fumbling, childlike man—illustrate it with dark clarity. "People live their lives tied to work and knowledge and habit. . . . From childhood they spin threads round themselves and wrap themselves up more and more tightly until they're nothing but cocoons."

Mr. Waltari writes as a poet, exactly and feelingly, when he explores human motives. But it is poetry narrowed by a fixed point of view, hedged in by disillusion, with the warm colors ruthlessly pruned out. Cinderella claws her way up in the world, but there is no fairy prince waiting and not much of a view from the hilltop. As for the men who play opposite Cinderella: "Their secret wishes and desires were simple and gross, though each one of them fancied himself in some way remarkable and different from the rest." This is not the stuff of sweetness and light, but from it the author has fashioned stories with queer low-key power that keeps them in mind longer than many of the "after Chekhov" stories which reach the American market these days.

Of the five stories four are written in the first person and transcribe experiences that lead to disenchantment with life. Of these "Goldilocks" seems most vivid, perhaps because it manages a tour de force in its realistic chronicle of a girl who begins as

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