

Books of the Day

NEW NOVELS

ELIZABETHAN SUSSEX

SUPERSTITION CORNER. By SHEILA KAYE-SMITH. (Cassell. 7s. 6d. net.)

In this story of Elizabethan Sussex in the days of the Armada, Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith vividly recaptures the atmosphere of those eventful days. The action takes place mostly near Rye, finishing near Chichester. The date is August/October of the famous year 1588, when Roman Catholics were naturally more unpopular in England than ever before or since. These were the last three months of Kate Alard's life. At the beginning she is a squire's daughter. Her father's influence saves her from the legal penalties of recusancy. Her attempt to celebrate Mass led to tragedy; a house burned, its owner killed, a priest caught and condemned to a horrid death. Who was the informer? Kate suspected a Huguenot refugee, but he had suffered too much from penal laws to wish to enforce them. Besides religion the story contains one tragic love intrigue, and many striking pictures of Elizabethan Sussex, when putrid fever (of which Kate died) was treated with infusion of ragwort, when hops in ale were thought to give it a Protestant taste, when squires and their daughters spoke pure Sussex, and when windows were still often unglazed. Kate dreamed being shut up behind glass.

14 A. By LAURA RIDING and GEORGE ELLIOTT. (Arthur Barker. 7s. 6d. net.)

This complicated history, or series of histories, is handled with great lightness and dexterity. The form of the narrative approximates to that of a play; the characters are neatly epitomized on introduction, and their dialogue, which is very amusing and well-managed and occupies most of the book, is set out in play form. The action is centred in the affairs of Hugh, an Irish poet, Maureen, his wife, whom he leaves at the beginning of the book, Catherine, with whom he goes to live in London, and several other inhabitants of 14A, the house in which Catherine has a flat. There are many subsidiary characters; notable among whom are Dorothy, whose attempts to establish a "Culture Centre" for psychic communion provide much entertainment; Janey and Billy, an actress and a ballet dancer, who have a love story of their own; and John, "a sort of theatrical odd-jobs man," very much a man-of-the-world and a great help in difficult situations. The briskness and economy with which the whole narrative is conducted enable us to unravel the involved threads of the story without confusion.

THE WOMAN WHO HAD IMAGINATION AND OTHER STORIES. By H. E. BATES. (Cape. 7s. 6d. net.)

With "The Fallow Land" Mr. Bates stepped decisively beyond the achievement of any of his earlier novels, and now with the present volume he makes a no less marked advance as a writer of short stories. His tales have, what current short story writing of the more literary type so often lacks, a real vitality, a kind of sunlit vivacity of phrase and incident, which gives brightness to stories even of relatively sombre theme. His range is wide, and seems increasing; he can mingle comedy and emotion with a fine balance. He is always sensitive, often tender, and has a fine detachment in narrative and power of complete excision in description, as when he writes of "flickering butterflies electric with sunlight, scraps of turquoise and lemon, tortoiseshell and ivory, soft and light as flying flowers," or of "brown boots as polished as a chestnut." To name individual stories is, in this collection of 14, but to name the best among two exceptions, extremely good. "The Lily," the title-story, "Time," "A German Idyll," "The Waterfall," "Innocence," and best of all "The Gleaner," do even so markedly stand out. They have a pure beauty of imagination and execution which gives Mr. Bates a high and growing place among living short story writers.

THE OLDEST INDEPENDENT. By EDEN PHILLIPPS. (Hutchinson. 7s. 6d. net.)

Mr. Phillips might have called his protagonist here the Rustic Machiavelli, for the intricate schemings by which "Granfer" outwits the matrimonial affairs of his little circle can seldom have been equalled outside political circles. "Granfer" is a remarkable old man, and his family and the two widowed sisters, whose future he arranges much as he moves the men on his beloved draught-board, are little less remarkable. Their sentiments are unimpeachable and their language of which they all have a most astonishing command, is keeping. "Granfer" equals them all in volubility and completely outdoes them in cunning, while appearing to everyone but the reader, one of the simplest of old men who "means well, but the mind ain't there now, as one of his mistaken granddaughters puts it. In the end he parts off the right couple, succeeds in getting the mortgage lifted off his house, and contrives to get £5,000 settled on his penniless son. It is all very good fun and Mr. Phillips's large circle of admirers will chuckle delightfully over this new exposition of the craftiness and simple duplicity of the rustic mind.

WINTERFIELD. By MARJORIE BOOTH. (Ivor Nicholson and Watson. 7s. 6d. net.)

Miss Booth's new novel is an extremely interesting and well-written psychological study of a man imprisoned in his own narrow, morbid fancies. Mark Winterfield is a chemist in Paddington with one son, Julian, who is studying to be an architect. His wife, Elmer, has left him, after betraying him with the young cousin Louis, who lived with them. Conscientious in his daily work, Mark likes to idealize himself as the friend and benefactor of his customers, but behind this outward semblance his mind works ceaselessly, preying on itself. He marries Catherine Lawrence, his assistant. For a short time he comes out of his gloomy prison, but in spite of Catherine's charm and transparent honesty the old mania reasserts itself. He is racked with groundless suspicions of the feeling between his wife and his son, Julian; a nice normal boy, begins to avoid his father, whose moods irritate and puzzle him. Catherine, terrified by Mark, confides in an old friend who, seeing that Mark is barely sane, begs her to leave him. Mark overhears them, and in an instant his jealousy of Julian is turned to raging hatred of his wife and friend. Drug-sodden, he wanders into Kensington Gardens, looking for Julian, and there his miserable brain ceases its mad self-torturing. This is a short but masterly analysis of a mind deranged by self-pity and jealousy.