

## NEW NOVELS

### AKBAR'S INDIA

How good it is, in times like these, to holiday in another world! In *THE POOL OF VISHNU* (Cape, 9s. 6d.) Mr. L. H. Myers provides such a world in the form of sixteenth-century India, with the culture, politeness, and splendour of which readers of his "The Root and the Flower" are acquainted already. The new novel resumes the history of Rajah Amar's family, and especially of his son Jali, whose education brings him into touch with several sides of a civilization strangely like ours. Dissensions between conservative and liberal elements are already apparent, and the fashionableness of Rajah Bhoj and his wife cannot excuse their fundamental errors. Jali's travels, however, also lead him to the former Rajah Mohan and his wife, who show a practical interest in socialism, and to the Guru without whom no work on India would be complete. This rough statement of motives is inadequate, of course, when one reflects on the innumerable subtleties of thought and character with which the book is enriched. Yet it does roughly cover what is most important in a novel in which mere events and descriptions, excellent though these are, are of less importance than the consideration of the ethics of human behaviour. In only one instance, in the inset discussion between the Guru and the Princess Damayanti on the propriety of her marriage to Mohan, are we inclined to doubt the integrity of Mr. Myers's conclusions. Here alone we suspect some intellectual sleight of hand.

*STEFFAN GREEN* (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.) is a pleasant entertainment for another taste. Miss Richmal Crompton sets down her unhappy divorcee in an English village in which there is enough material for half-a-dozen stories, and certainly enough to take her mind off her own troubles. There is the vicar's wife, who was once a suffragette; there are two separate sets of mothers and sons; there are the two young ladies under the stern, antique eye of their grandmother at the castle, the young people from London, the mischievous visiting novelist, and the old mad woman who was once so prim and decent. With these one is effectually distracted.

This week there are good examples of two very different types of short story. Thirty of Mr. H. E. Bates's are re-published as *COUNTRY TALES* (Cape, 7s. 6d.), and since they represent his development during nearly 10 years the collection has a special interest. Some of the early ones, though not negligible, are facile, as the author admits in a preface; and it is amusing to see that even this accomplished writer has had to outgrow or to control the sentimentality that lies in wait for unwary writers. The importance of the volume, in fact, is primarily due to this illustration of a real development and to the fact that most of the stories have the freshness of experiment, though naturally not all the experiments succeed. Miss Theodora Benson's *BEST STORIES* (Faber and Faber, 7s. 6d.) show imagination working quite as livelily but at a different level. Her stories, many of which are set in the Dutch East Indies, are ingenious without being weighed down with plots, and though they seldom go as deep as Mr. Bates's they are generally quick, economical, and original. Miss Benson's humour, in particular, has a wide range.

J. S.