REVIEWS

NEW NOVELS

The Woman Who Rode Away. By D. H. LAWRENCE. (Secker. 7s. 6d.)
The House with the Echo. By T. F. POWYS. (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d.)
Day's End. By H. E. BATES. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)
The Grierson Mystery. By LLOYD OSBOURNE. (Heinemann. 7s. 6d.)
Farewell to Youth. By STORM JAMESON. (Heinemann. 7s. 6d.)
The Beast with Five Fingers, and Other Stories. By WILLIAM FRYER HARVEY. (Dent. 6s.)
The Pure in Heart. Translated from the French of J. KESSEL. (Gollancz. 7s. 6d.)

IT is very difficult to say anything new about Mr. D. H. Lawrence, but he is one of the few living English novelists about whom it is worth while to say anything at all. He reminds me of Van Gogh. He has the same natural feeling for the material in which he works ; he builds up his pages with vivid contrasted tones analogous to the plaited brush-work of the painter. He has more imagination than critical sense. If he likes a phrase, he will keep repeating it, just as Van Gogh will spoil a picture by a reiteration of a spiral form which caught his fancy. And in both of them the missionary often obliterates the artist. The result is a similar inequality in their work. Mr. Lawrence has written some magnificent short stories, but never a satisfactory novel, unless it was his first. " Women in Love," " The Plumed Serpent," and the others all contain fine passages interspersed with nonsense. I think that actually the proportion of good writing is higher in his stories. He has his idea, and ends when it is exhausted. But in any case the weaker tales can be discarded, and there remain in " The Ladybird," " England, My England," and his new book, " The Woman Who Rode Away," enough superb things to situate him among our few living Aces.

There are two ways of setting about a short story. You may use an incident to depict a character, or you may dispense with characterization and invest your incident with some universal significance as a comment on life. Mr. Lawrence is not greatly interested in the individual character. The instincts common to human beings are his material, and the beauty of the external world. He has a number of theories about life and behaviour which excite his imagination and remain in his best work implicit. But when he tries to expound them he stammers and stumbles, and succeeds only in persuading his readers that he is incapable, as well as distrustful, of clear thought. His preoccupation is principally with the non-intellectual sympathies and antipathies which govern human relationships. The scientists have little or nothing to say on the subject. Why does Aglaia excite our compassion, Belinda our disgust? Why does the beauty of Cynthia drive us into follies, while that of Doris excites only a cold admiration? Why is it a comfort merely to be in the room with Eugenius while we avoid like the plague Flavius, who has a pleasanter voice, better looks, and a more interesting mind? Mr. Lawrence thinks, or thought, that the solar plexus has something to do with it. The adrenal or thyroid gland would provide an equally good and equally bad explanation. His favourite words, " dark " and " deep," however often repeated, do little to help our understanding. Where most novelists are content to use the more explicable sides of human relation as their material, it is Mr. Lawrence's struggle to express our most deeply hidden impulses which lands him in such difficulties. For this exploitation of the subconscious is perilous work. In France, for instance, it has led almost a whole generation of writers into a wilderness of obscure phraseology. " A man has to be in love in his thighs, the way you ride a horse," says one of Mr. Lawrence's characters, " why don't we stay in love that way all our lives? Why do we turn into corpses with consciousness? " The reader may find it very tiresome of an artist to have a message, but some of the greatest have, in fact, been convinced that they had one: in time the message is neglected, and the work of art to which it stood midwife remains. I think the centre of Mr. Lawrence's message is this, " Do not let your consciousness kill you," and I do not think that it is nonsense, though his elaborations on the theme and attempts to expound it often are. The development of human consciousness is the most important fact in history, though every historian has neglected it. And this quarter of a century has, I believe, seen one of the crises of this development. The consciousness of intelligent Europeans has expanded suddenly, and perhaps too fast. Mr. Lawrence's protests against this are as futile as those of old ladies against aeroplanes and cavalry commanders against poison gas. We suffer from consciousness ; we cannot destroy it. It may dry up the springs of poetry, incapacitate us for lasting love, make us a generation without energy to create, or conviction to endure the vanity of life. But we cannot go back. Man has come upon other crises and escaped upon the other side. It seems likely that he will do so again. If Mr. Lawrence's advice is useless, at least he has put the problem. And in any case, we can, forgetting it, enjoy the myths he has imagined, " Sun," " None of That," " Jimmy and the Desperate Woman," " Glad Ghosts," and, best of all, " The Woman Who Rode Away "—one of the most impressive stories, I think, in contemporary literature.

Mr. T. F. Powys's tales are shorter, and in every way far less significant. They are rustic grotesques, fluent caricatures of beings labelled Mr. Calamy, Mr. Cobb, Mr. Dottery, Mr. Croot, Mr. Balliboy, Mr. Topp, Mr. Hayball, Carter Beer, Mr. Moggs, Mrs. Fancy, Squire Duffy, and Sexton Truggin—human animals who struggle upon the clay till death comes and wraps them tight in it. There is less brutality in it than in most of Mr. Powys's books, and in at least one story, " I came as a Bride," there is beauty. But his vision of the countryside has become almost stereotyped. He took one look at it (you might say), and his art stood still.

The plot of " The Grierson Mystery " depends on a letter left with instructions that it is not to be opened for a year after the writer's death ; why, the book does not reveal. The only reason seems that without them the book could not have been written. But if Mr. Lloyd Osbourne is not a master of plot, the actual writing of the book shows him faithful to R. L. Stevenson's tradition of craftsmanship. After the choppy movement of most thrillers, the smooth going of Mr. Osbourne's style comes as a delight.

Miss Storm Jameson's novel is vastly better than the other books I have read by her. She has chastened her style, and the story strikes one as sincere. There are convincing pictures of the Front, and, apart from the annoyingly perfect heroine, the characters have life.

Mr. Bates's talent is difficult to define. He keeps himself well in the background in the best-mannered way. Yet he never reminds one of any particular writer. He does not often attempt to characterize his figures: they are just human beings in the common tragic situations of life, childbirth, unhappy love, illness and old age, death. And round them is the English countryside, in painting which Mr. Bates makes continual and deliberate use of the pathetic fallacy, so that the struggles and sufferings of man may appear part of a universal rule, to which also the clouds and trees obey. I recommend " Day's End " to lovers of quiet writing and the eternal verities.

" The Beast with Five Fingers " is a collection of stories almost all of which contain supernatural happenings. In their sort they are remarkably good.

" The Pure in Heart " contains translations anonymous, but able, of Monsieur Kessel's novel " L'Equipage " and his book of short stories called " Les Cœurs purs." The stories which are concerned with the savage inhabitants of County Cork and the Cossack country, are vivid journalism ; the novel a remarkable work, which expresses contemporary sensibility in the traditional technique of Maupassant and Bourget. The plot is as neat as a new shoe. A French flying squadron during the war provides protagonists and chorus. Two members of it who fly together as pilot and observer become bound, by dangers faced together, in a tie as close as a human relationship can be. They describe to each other the very different women whom they love, the one his pure, remote wife, the other his impulsive, passionate mistress. And they are the same woman. The book ends fatally with the younger man's death, and the husband and wife reunited in their common sorrow. Monsieur Kessel describes air fighting and states of mind equally well. " Pilot and Observer " has no pretensions to " greatness " : it is moving and utterly accomplished.

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