

Lesbian Week

- A Crown of Wild Myrtle.** By H. E. BATES.
Joseph. 15s.
- Cast But One Shadow and Winter Love.** By
HAN SUYIN. *Cape.* 16s.
- Ask Me Tomorrow.** By STAN BARSTOW.
Joseph. 16s.
- Paid Servant.** By E. R. BRAITHWAITE. *Bodley
Head.* 15s.
- The Little White God.** By EDWIN BROCK.
Hutchinson. 16s.
- The Hands of Esau.** By HIRAM HAYDN. *Long-
mans.* 28s.
- Youngblood Hawke.** By HERMAN WOUK.
Collins. 30s.
- A Captive in the Land.** By JAMES ALDRIDGE.
Hamish Hamilton. 21s.

It's some time since I read an H. E. Bates. I escaped his recent rib-bending phase. In *A Crown of Wild Myrtle* he goes straight again, with perfectly tolerable results. The novella length always suited him. This is the story of a young man (Jack Marsden) on a Greek island cruise who meets Ruth, a wistful American girl travelling with Mrs Heller, a middle-aged Lesbian, one of those madly jealous scene-makers. He suggests she should break away and come and join him, and suddenly, after an interval of a few days, she does. Their idyll is interrupted by the middle-aged one who comes after them, takes pot shots at Jack, then kills herself. It's capably done, in its way and up to a point. The cruise and island backgrounds - first-hand, I should think - are nicely observed. Mrs Heller makes quite an impression considering how little we see of her. There's something not quite right about the girl, Ruth, though; her past isn't properly planted. I doubt if old Bates really knows much about Lesbians.

A Lesbian love affair makes by far the best of the two stories in Han Suyin's book. The lovers are Red, a young science student - she, I suppose, would be the 'butch' or masculine one in Lesbian slang - and Mara, a frail young married woman with a Swiss husband who is nearly always away. Red tells the story. It's wartime, which helps to thicken the atmosphere and make everything more disjointed. There is some genuine passion of that peculiarly intense vampiric Lesbian kind and several good natural contretemps in and out of flats, lodgings and a magnificently ghastly country guest-house, Lesbian-run. It tails away realistically though I wasn't totally convinced by the bisexual ease with which Red switched to men. I greatly preferred it to the first of the stories: based on a true wartime incident about a Dutch girl who was brought up in an Indonesian village, it's been switched to Cambodia, and told in semi-dramatic allegorical form with a knowing astrologer to pipe up for the culture of the East and Buddhism.

Mr Barstow has been having a nasty attack of second-novel trouble. *Ask Me Tomorrow* has none of the sureness of touch that was such a feature of *A Kind of Loving*. It falters and changes mood self-consciously. Wilf is a wages clerk by day and a writer by night; in the small hours he sleeps with his landlady who is most gratuitously murdered by an unseen husband on the penultimate page. We never see him - Wilf - at work; he spends far too much time fussing about getting his stories accepted and making literary conversation. And he doesn't, because he is in love with her, allow himself to sleep