

## Stories by H. E. Bates

*THE WOMAN WHO HAD IMAGINATION, AND OTHER STORIES.* By H. E. Bates. 288 pp. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.

**M**OST readers who are interested in the modern short story are already familiar with the work of H. E. Bates. This young Englishman has experimented widely with the short-story form and has attempted, by abandoning the familiar and confining formulas, to expand it into a freer and more sensitive medium of expression. To this endeavor he has brought an evident artistic sincerity, a finely drawn imagination, and a supple and polished prose—all attributes which serve to offset a certain thinness in the material he habitually selects.

This collection of fourteen short stories maintains the artistic standards of Mr. Bates's previous work; but only one or two of the

stories presented here have sufficient substance in themselves to justify the carefully wrought setting Mr. Bates has been at pains to give them. The title story, "The Woman Who Had Imagination," is brilliantly suggestive, but it leaves one in the end with a feeling of vague dissatisfaction. The history of a tragic marriage is given to us, indirectly and in fragments, as it is seen through the uncomprehending eyes of a young shop assistant on a holiday. Mr. Bates achieves his particularly ironic effect by contrasting the girl's unhappy story with the background from which the young man emerges, with a day's outing of an English country chorus and the ribald merriment of the junketing choristers.

The longest, and perhaps the most complete and ponderable story in the collection, is "A German Idyll." Its narrative outlines are excessively simple, but its emotional effect is inescapable. A German book-seller, who had run away to London as a boy twenty years before, is returning to his native village, unannounced, for a visit to his people. He brings with him a young Englishman named Richardson, for his first glimpse of Germany. The warm hospitality of their reception, the special deference paid to Richardson, his shy and necessarily inarticulate romance with Anna, the pretty daughter of the village inn-keeper, are described with truly idyllic simplicity. The fact that the romance is inconclusive, that Anna is away on the day when Richardson must take his leave, and that he knows he will never see her again, does nothing to rob the story of its charm and fragrance.

The other pieces in the collection are much shorter. Some of them, indeed, are scarcely stories at all, but are rather character sketches or episodes, depending for their effect upon a kind of reticent irony.

There is "Millennium Also Ran," the story of a sentimental young reporter who laid a wager on a horse race, meaning to assist with his winnings a destitute young widow whose plight had caused him to reflect, for a brief hour, that civilization is out of joint. The more amusing and robust character sketches are "The Lily," "The Wedding," and "The Death of Uncle Silas"—all of them dealing with the adventures of Uncle Silas, that stout, virile and incredibly ancient gentleman who is one of Mr. Bates's most delightful creations.