Mr. H. E. Bates.

THERE are passages in **Mr. H. E. Bates's** new novel, "**The Poacher**" (Cape, 7s. 6d.), which have the feel of something more enduring than contemporary fiction. This sense of permanency is hard to define. It is due to a quality of the author's mind more than to his style or subject. One feels it (for instance) in Hardy's books, and it appears not only in the characters, but in the world in which he sets them—an air of timelessness, a universal quality behind all, such as one feels, say, as witness of a quiet daybreak. Such an author is concerned with his people as representatives of humanity and not as exceptions; he simplifies to identify them, whereas other novelists elaborate to isolate and distinguish them. All this, however, is defining the indefinable; but it helps to draw attention to one or two qualities apparent in Mr. Bates's work: his simplicity of aim, the broadness of his characterization, his water-clear and quiet style of writing, the pleasure he takes to seize upon the permanent scenes and settings in human experience—snowfall, nightfall, cornland, woodland—as backgrounds for his people. You lose yourself in the great woods as his poachers do, you look about you across the snow and *live* the empty prospect, you run your hand lovingly over the blades of the springing barley.

> Outside the air was cold, with a sense of snow. He walked quickly as he went through the town, skirting beyond the square, and out towards the bare flat country. As he walked across the windy fields the wind came straight from the east into his face. He could see the clouds extending into the farthest distance like a series of shaggy waves, infinitely grey and sombre. He felt a sense of relief and pleasure as he walked and looked at the familiar country, deserted except for the sheep lying quiet under the hedges in the treeless fields and the flocks of peewits feeding on the dark ploughed land. As he reached the higher country above Tichmarsh, under the shelter of the great belt of woods, the wind seemed to quieten down. He climbed the slope and looked back: the village, with its square-towered church, the little white pub, the quiet, bare fields beyond, were all as familiar to him as his own hands. And for the first time in his life it gave him a conscious pleasure simply to stand there and look at it all.

This passage might be matched by many others. Person, land, and season are all alive together—lived, not merely seen, or remembered. And landscape quality is one of the great sources of pleasure (and truth) in Mr. Bates's books. It justifies a mention of Hardy, whom he resembles in this.

The two poachers, father and son, are people whom one delights to know. There is the hint of a gypsy ancestry, and the father has something of the gypsy's resourceful cunning remaining in him. Luke has none. Yet so thorough had been his father's instruction, Luke could not master the poaching lust in himself. We watch him trying to keep away from it, but the sight of a rabbit or hare sets his heart thumping, even when he is an old man, and his greatest delight at last is to teach the rudiments of the dangerous game to his grandson.

"The Poacher" is not a long novel; but in the course of it we follow Luke from seventeen to sixty or so, and the essence of character is wonderfully preserved through all the changes of age and outlook. Mr. Bates succeeds almost as well in the early part with Luke's father and with his crusty old aunt. By comparison, he fails, I think, in Luke's wife, whose behaviour seems to be dictated by what the author has designed shall happen to Luke, and not by any central core of character in her. Mr. Bates fails, too, in the conscious secondary plot—to show the change in provincial England wrought by the industrial revolution. One feels this as an imposition and worry even to the author, whose heart is not in sociology, and not even in the play of society, but in the solitary, simple, earth-born, earth-loving individual.

Bates develops surely though slowly. This book shows his best powers better than ever before. The talk is terse and true, the land is vivid and livingly painted, the individual is slowly and lovingly unfolded, life is watched, wondered at, accepted.

FRANK KENDON.

## VIVACIOUS COMMONPLACE.

**By MARY CROSBIE.**

MANY an author whose sales remain selectly small must debate at times the qualities that make for popularity. He will probably conclude that the first of them is a gift of vivacious commonplace. To be animated and in earnest about the platitudes of life creates a sort of tea-party atmosphere in which tea-party minds are at home. Of the three books under review at this moment "**The Door Opens,**" by **Miss Muriel Hine** (Lane, 7s. 6d.), would seem bound for this happy popularity, even if it were a first novel. As the list on its title-page shows, it follows about twenty others. Phillida Pirnie, a girl of to-day in her freedom of speech and apparent freedom of action, proves capable of sacrificing her happiness for her father's in quite an old-fashioned way. The ease of a practised story-teller carries the book along, the persons are neatly combined, and their characters can be sorted at a glance. Readers who look for the strange or the subtle will not find it here. Readers who like a pleasant, unexacting tale cleverly made to an old formula will be more than satisfied.

"**The White Peony,**" by **Miss Evelyn Herbert** (Cape, 7s. 6d.), is the story of a Welsh mining town, so there is not much likelihood of its being overcomfortable. It is not. But it conveys the beauty of man's fortitude as well as the beauty of the mountains above the dark town. Its men and women are obsessed by real and vital problems. They have some of the splendour of earth's undefeated life. This is the first novel by Miss Herbert that I have read. It is impressively urgent and alive; a trifle over-physical, perhaps, as is the way when urgency is partly fashion and partly truth. But emphatically it is alive.

The preoccupations of the people in "**Down by the Salley Gardens,**" by **Miss Barbara Noble** (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.), are not the problems of living and starving, preaching damnation, and catching at earthly joy. Adrian Dishart is self-conscious and self-tormenting. If Hamlet's name had been Dishart and he had lived in our post-War world, he might have been such another. "Clever, self-possessed, and popular," Adrian was outwardly. Inwardly, he was pathetically lost, and his love for Mrs. Holden, a woman fifteen years older than himself, who had come to look after his young invalid sister, is treated by her to the end as a boy's immature passion. The "pity of it" is strongly felt, and the quietness with which the tale moves is curiously compelling. One seems to be involved in the relations of these people to each other without the usual reader's excitement or distaste. One *is* Adrian. One *is* Mrs. Holden at moments. At other moments one stands aside and rates Adrian for a young fool and Mrs. Holden for being Mrs. Holden. Tiresome, true, real people! I don't want to see them again, but that may be a tribute to their reality and Miss Noble's art.

## MRS. REA'S STORIES.

**By RICHARD CHURCH.**

"SIX AND SEVEN," a collection of stories by **Mrs. Lorna Rea** (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.), is surely acceptable to everybody—cynic, sentimentalist, realist, and romantic. For these tales are written by an artist with an unusual depth of compassion. Without any tortuous probings into psychological channels and crannies, she sees and reveals the motives of human actions, the cross purposes, the twistings and tangles, which complicate our daily lives into a thousand unexpected dramas. She does it so simply; with a technique so old-fashioned and dignified that one might be reading away back in the pages of Mrs. Gaskell. Never an ambiguous phrase, never a false or fantastic image, come between the reader and