

Tales in Somber Vein

"The Daffodil Sky," by H. E. Bates (Little, Brown. 256 pp. \$3.50), a new collection of short pieces by an adept storyteller, features a number that are concerned with man's failure to achieve love and understanding.

By William Peden

IN HIS new collection of short stories entitled "The Daffodil Sky" H. E. Bates demonstrates once again that he is as competent and entertaining as any living English writer. Equally adept with the character sketch, the expanded incident, or the fully plotted story, the author of "The Purple Plain," "Colonel Julian," and many other books of first-rate fiction continues to write with a finesse which must be the despair of some of his contemporaries.

Many of these essentially bleak stories are concerned with a man's failure to achieve love and understanding. The protagonist of the title story begins to live only after his chance encounter, outside a rain-drenched pub, with a lusty young woman "full of the uncanny instinct of the blood." He is a likable individual, this young grower of daffodils. On the surface he is a reasonably disciplined, not ungentle, human being. Basically, however, he is uncertain, afraid, and capable of great violence; tragedy is his destiny as he gropes his halting way through a world he never comprehends. This kind of semi-primitive man appears often in Mr. Bates's stories. His physical competence only underscores his essential loneliness and vulnerability. He feels with the blood, as it were, and the blood—as stories like "The Daffodil Sky" or "The Good Corn" or "Roman Figures" suggest—can betray or save with equal indifference.

Mr. Bates's intellectuals are, similarly, battlegrounds of warring impulses and conflicting emotions. Characteristic is the young Englishman of "Across the Bay," whose existence suddenly becomes meaningful because of his love affair with a French girl. He is "smitten" with gray loneliness. . . . He felt sickened by people. He wanted no one near him but the girl, on the burning shore or in the calm darkness." But he cannot give himself to her completely. Like the detached traveler of "Third View on the Reichenbach" or the mildly psychotic officer of "A Place in the Heart," he asks for more than he is capable of giving; if he receives less than he needs it is, perhaps, as much as he

deserves. They have had it, these men, in one way or another, because of the war or fatigue or some congenital inability to accept life as it is. In their emptiness they are more akin to Eliot's hollow men than their semi-primitive counterparts are to D. H. Lawrence's men of the blood.

In somewhat less serious vein Mr. Bates has created a remarkable group of people, pleasant, not so pleasant, and definitely unpleasant: a sex-conscious mother contemplating the disturbing fact that her daughters have become fully developed, inviting, and complicated young women; two old maids with their paragon of a manservant; a corpulent, violin-playing coffin maker on a Sunday afternoon.

Even more than his great technical skill, his effective evocation of a sense of place, or his virtuosity as a teller of tales, this expert delineation of character is the source of much of Mr. Bates's success. It can be said of him, as Arnold Bennett said of himself, that he comes neither to scoff nor to patronize, but to comprehend. Perhaps, in these days, we have no right to ask any more of an author.



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Conducted

SECOND AN

Nan Cooke Carpenter of Missoula, M people in families where genius and fam on page 36.

1. Prototype of his own Colonel Sar sippi's first citizen (literarily speaking) a melodramatic novel.
2. Daughter of an illustrious doctor of of music in England, this Dresser to the Her Majesty's snuff) left a diary full of and a famous novel about a "Young La
3. Erstwhile lecturer at Princeton, thi winner continued to produce tales of d (wife of W. H. Auden) has concentrat
4. The mother of this British post-described his system of producing a con for her (in this country) offensive "Do for her forty-odd novels.
5. Daughter of an English poet laur that no official verse would be require ably written by his son-in-law), thou personalities of his wife and sister, his nal of a Few Months' Residence in Pc
6. The mother of a famous eccent (dressed as a girl until five years old in hopes of a daughter) wrote Irish ba kept up a sprightly salon in Dublin.
7. Although she began with didactic on society and education obtained larg on Irish Bulls" and "Practical Educatio one of the best historical novels befor
8. Famous father of a more famous among the transcendentalists and the lands, while she stabilized the family a classic among girls' books.