

## TELLING STORIES

H. E. BATES: *The Daffodil Sky*. Michael Joseph. 12s. 6d.  
EUDORA WELTY: *The Bride of the Innisfallen*. Hamish Hamilton. 12s. 6d.  
JOHN PUDNEY (Editor): *Pick of Today's Short Stories*, 6. Putnam. 12s. 6d.

Mr. H. E. Bates is never less than an expert storyteller, but some of his work in recent years, although effective enough on its own level, has not seemed fully to engage his interest and affection. He is not one of those writers who work well by viewing their subject from a distance, and the pleasure one gets from most of the fifteen stories in his new collection, *The Daffodil Sky*, springs from the fact that in them Mr. Bates has returned to the manner of his early books. The characteristics of this early work were keen observation of scenes and habits in the English countryside, a sympathy with country people that permitted the use of sometimes quite brilliant irony, and a deliberate avoidance of melodrama that led him to obtain his effects by under-emphasis.

The title story of this collection, for instance, tells of a man who has come out of prison after serving a term for manslaughter and who calls on the woman with whom he was in love. Jealousy of a suspected lover prompted his crime: and now he meets not the woman but her daughter, and begins to repeat with her the pattern of his former love affair. Is the love affair repeated? Is the woman the man's own daughter? Characteristically Mr. Bates ignores those questions, leaving in the mind simply several vivid impressions: of rain, of an industrial town in the Midlands, of a rich, almost overpowering, sensuality.

The quality of romantic nostalgia for youth is apparent in much of Mr. Bates's later work, and it is finely handled here in "Country Society"

(the host at a boring country party talks far too long to a young girl who finds everything exciting). Across the Bay" and "The Small Portion." One or two of the stories are slight, but they have a sureness of touch that lifts them out of the range of mere anecdote.

Many women writers to-day seem to be moving uncertainly on a narrow path through a quicksand of whimsy. Some, alas (and Miss Eudora Welty is one of them), have only too evidently taken one or more false steps and, with their original talent fast disappearing beneath bubbling mud, urgently need a rope's haul back to firm land. The seven stories in *The Bride of the Innisfallen* are archly ingenious, tediously clever. The disjointed fragments of conversation on train and boat in the title story, the expanded Civil War anecdote called "The Burning," an elliptically told tale about a professional rainmaker and a small boy—these show a disintegration of the comic sense which delighted us in Miss Welty's first book, *A Curtain of Green*. The declension is particularly sad because Miss Welty's talent showed as so plainly fresh and original in her early work.

Mr. John Pudney brings us, for the sixth year, a selection from the short stories of the year. From a collection that is generally very lively, half a dozen stories stand out: Miss P. B. Abercrombie's ingenious and disturbing account of a novelist's involvement with her own characters, Mr. John Atkins's amusing incident from village life, exercises in the supernatural by Mr. Louis Golding and Mr. L. P. Hartley, and fantasies by Mr. John Denton and Mr. Dal Slivens. The general level of the work is high, particularly when one bears in mind the brevity of the stories and the small number of well-known contributors.