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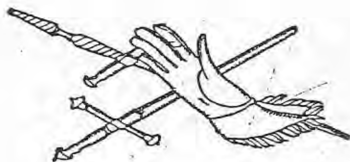
to what purpose . . . it would interest me to know': an *immediate* feeling for reality which has the effect of a grim humour — Hall the Icelander is carried overboard in the storm and washed in again: he said, 'It is not much better here than it was out there, but still I am glad to be with my friends again.' Kol's grief for a friend makes Skallagrim say, 'No one dies of another man's wound': a simplicity even in cunning — 'Kol answered, "A man can always tell lies at night".' The roots of some things in the English character are twisted with these.

The climax of the book is the Skua's long voyage south, from Orkney to England, and the fight that comes at the end of it. The account of this voyage — nearly a quarter of the whole book — is a magnificent piece of writing, and to be added to the great sea-pieces in our literature. And the fight is flesh and blood on the dry bones of Anglo-Saxon verse. It would be worth while giving it to students to read alongside their *Beowulf*. There is something I want to know. Did they or did they not come ashore, after that voyage, in the very place where I write this? It must be Whitby — that sandbar across the river has overturned a fleet of boats since, and those burnt stone ruins would be the first abbey, destroyed by Danes between 867 and 870. And the charred timber of a small town below the dead abbey — Whitby, or I'm not a Whitby woman.



These Shall Endure[1]

by Winifred Holtby

WHEN Mr. Bates wrote *The Two Sisters*, that first novel was remarkable for qualities of lyrical imagination and nervous intensity. Its characters moved in a dream-like world of sensations, emotions, and fine-drawn filaments of intuitive perception. Natural beauty was there, in the river, the garden and the shadow-haunted house. But the family lived in legendary isolation. The dead mother with her remembered violin, the mad father, the brothers, and the two lonely girls, moved untrammelled by the hard impersonal world of material circumstance, and the occasional mention of shops and warehouses broke oddly into their enchanted river-side domain. Even when Tessa went away, her eighteen-months' adventure drew her no closer to the external and social life of the community. Harlington might be in Heaven or on Wuthering Heights or surrounding Childe Roland's dark tower, for all its connection with the workaday world.

In that remoteness, that fairy-tale lyricism lay the strength and the weakness of Mr. Bates' early work. But recently he has been opening his eyes with comprehension instead of closing them with sensitive repulsion, when confronted by the world's harsh texture of reality. And his writing has gained in strength. For though man cannot live on bread alone, and novels cannot live on facts alone, without bread we starve, and without facts, novels fade off in unsubstantial moods and ecstasies. It is in the conflict between man's perceptive spirit and

[1] *The Fallow Land*. A novel by H. E. Bates. (Crown 8vo. 7s. 6d. net)

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the hard stuff of circumstance that true drama lies, and our minds cannot retain the memory of the spirit without adequate recognition of its imprisoning matter.

The Fallow Land has advanced far beyond *The Two Sisters* because in it the human emotions and perceptions are strongly rooted in material circumstance. Mr. Bates has worked from within outwards, and his achievements are justifying his method.

The story is simple and tragic. The theme is man's struggle with the soil from which he wrests a precarious livelihood. The period covered is from the end of the nineteenth century, when servant girls were thankful to receive five shillings a week all found, and young farmers won prize-money in fairs, up till the post-war era of tractors and motor buses. The heroine, Deborah, the sturdy, sensible, courageous servant girl, meets Jess Mortimer at a fair, marries him, and goes to the unending labour of a fifty-acre farm.

Mr. Bates knows that farm. But it is more than a marked area. It is in some way a symbol of British agriculture. When the old Mortimers worked the small-holding before she came, their meagre, laborious life typified the whole fashion and measure of peasant agriculture. Her mastery and extension of the farm, the acquisition of the Twelvetree holding, and the prosperity of the war-time and immediate post-war period, coincide with the farming boom which led agriculturists to think that this harvest time might last for ever. And the downfall of Benjamin, whose gay, truculent enterprise began with motor tractors and an urban wife, and ended with bailiffs and a motor bus, might stand for a hundred major and minor tragedies over which the old people shake their heads to-day.

So the return of Jess borrows from larger experience a quality of pathos and sorrow almost heroic in its simplicity.

'Rum times,' he said.

'Yes.'

'What are we coming to?'

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'Won't ever be the same again, will it?'

She shook her head. The conversation faltered and silence returned. . . .

To her relief he spoke once more.

'Land's in a poor way,' he said.

'The land's all right,' she said quickly. 'It's the people on it. The land's still the same as ever.'

As in his earlier books, Mr. Bates writes a serene and measured prose. His eye is alert for natural beauties, the fall of snow, the harvest fields, the village fair. But here is a richer enjoyment of human relationships. As usual, Mr. Bates must introduce some aspect of eccentricity; the Twelvetree household is nearly as queer as the home of his *Two Sisters*. But the war scenes, the pressure brought upon David before he enlists, the decadence of Benjamin, and the sense of neighbourliness round the Mortimers' holding, plants the farm solidly in its rural surroundings.

If there is still in his work a faint lethargy of composition, a sense of evasion about his more dramatic scenes, even these faults are less conspicuous than in the former novels. He is now apparently writing with his intellect as well as with his nerves and his emotions. And from the quality of apprehended and controlled experience comes the sense of universal and undying values, of those things which endure beyond the changing face of human history.

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