

# An extension of a dream long held

## The Blossoming World By H. E. Bates

(Michael Joseph £2.50)

The virtue of this second autobiographical volume is its power to evoke both parallel and transversal memories in the reader with a poignant simplicity and superb clarity of expression. It is a writer's life in progress described in splendid and fascinating detail: the launching of the young (barely 21) novelist, in 1926, through the many stages of trial and error, tribulation and joy, to firm establishment as a prolific novelist, short story writer and essayist. In 1941 he was chosen by the Air Ministry to mobilize his art and craft for the benefit of the RAF. "Flying Officer X" was the *nom de plume* under which Bates wrote *The Greatest People in the World* and *How Sleep the Brave*.

Where this autobiography triumphs is that although the author never allows us to forget that his work is writing (a job he shows to be harder than most, calling for excruciating self-discipline, often against corrosive financial odds), he transmutes this highly personal experience into a whole range of areas recognizable and identifiable to all. The first job, the marriage, the first success, the house bought, the slip back, the going on in the lean times, the coming to terms, the maturing years, the sense of some personal

security finally reached—all these are common experience made uncommon for each individual. Mr Bates's impact is suggestive: he awakens similar memories through his own loving honesty of recollection.

Enchanting the picture of the young man coming to London to meet his first publisher, Jonathan Cape, to receive his first contract and cheque (£25), and to be taken up by the firm's reader, the fabulous Edward Garnett, whose creative practical criticism was the real gold he needed. Garnett's world was an extension of the dream long held by the young man from Northamptonshire, a literary reality greeted with excitement and anticipation. Meeting other writers deepened the sense of a *métier*, as did friendship with Garnett's son, David. How tenderly is the marvellous ease of country living described.

So full of delight is this autobiography—the portrait of his mother, people met, books enjoyed, places known—that it is rather a pity to come across a streak of petulance, reiterated throughout, directed at all reviewers. Mr Bates was himself, in lean times, a reviewer, and must know that not all are totally illiterate. In a man who has suffered from "the erosion of confidence", such generalizations seem out of place. This apart, the pleasure given by his book has no qualification.

**Kay Dick**