

Ferguson proved to be a good picker of men and he was fortunate to find several, and one in particular, to supply the answers to many of these problems. It is extraordinary how this irascible man attracted and maintained the loyalty of his small team. One could have wished he had shown more generosity to them when, in later years, he accumulated a considerable fortune as a result of these pioneer efforts.

It is not surprising that a man of his character should be involved in many law suits, the most notable of which was with Ford of America. This expensive and lengthy suit brought many interesting situations to light, and also focused attention on technical points of law. For instance, the demarkation between invention and design. Can a person claim to be the first and true inventor of a device or scheme which he postulates and relies on others to work out? The fact that the 'others' were in his employment does not materially affect the judgement.

Harry Ferguson was a pioneer and there is no doubt that mechanised farming as we know it today was accelerated considerably by his efforts. The fact that all the devices which enabled the small tractor to perform large tasks would have evolved sooner or later in any case, does not detract from his outstanding contribution. Harry Ferguson's life was one of hard work and inspired endeavour and bitter controversy, all faithfully recorded in this excellent work.

In the welter of biographic literature available today, this book gives a valuable insight to the non-industrial reader of the struggles that create industry. Development and Technology are more and more these days a matter of teams, collegiate organisations and sometimes steam-hammers cracking nuts, but all rely on individuals who have the spark and creative thought plus the power to guide and direct the corporative effort towards the ultimate purpose. Such an individual was Harry Ferguson.

H E BATES

The World in Ripeness

152 PP ILLUS MICHAEL JOSEPH £3

TREVOR ALLEN

WHEN WE READ an author's memoirs we want to know what sparked off his books, how they linked with his life. H E Bates is illuminating on this in Vol 3 of his autobiography following *The Vanished World* and *The Blossoming World*. Like Somerset Maugham—or any worthwhile author—he turns experience to account. Once, for instance, he was touched for a

fiver loan by a fellow who thumbed a lift in his car. It was never returned, but he earned £250 writing a story about the encounter, *Mr Featherstone Takes a Ride*. That was thumbs up for both driver and passenger, sucker and soaker.

The war stories *By Flying Officer X*—first printing, 100,000—stemmed, of course from contacts with bomber and fighter commands when he was attached to Air Ministry Public Relations to write up the air exploits of pilots despite their dislike of 'shooting a line'. Out of his war contacts came, too, the novel *Fair Stood the Wind for France*, his 'first wide success' after 20 years' writing with its disasters and struggles. A trip to France after the liberation to write up the flying—bomb sites, which bored him, corroborated the imaginatively conceived background of the novel, much to his relief.

An assignment to India and Burma in '45 to write about the campaign for US reading was also fruitful for the novelist. He hated the dazing heat, the squalid slums of Calcutta, but a stay with a Scot and his wife in a flat on the Hooghli river brought recompense, for a regular caller there, an ex-Burma planter, was drinking himself to death. In the retreat from the Japs his personal bearer, a mere boy, had died, and the loss had plunged him into a chronic, morbid melancholia. From this seed sprang, years later, *The Jacaranda Tree*, a novel that further enhanced his reputation.

Needing a change for his health, Bates went north to the Darjeeling foothills and stayed with a tea-planter whose life seemed to him one of great loneliness. 'He lacked for nothing; a clap of the hands, the tinkle of a bell, would instantly bring him all he wanted, and yet the house was, it seemed to me, haunted by a great emptiness.' A few years later Bates put it all into a story, *The Frontier*, as Maugham put into his stories people he met on his eastern travels.

Later, a camp padre took him to a Burmese village where the women and children came out to greet their padre and offer a cool drink of fresh limejuice. 'A Burmese girl of extraordinary pale skin and very black hair and eyes, her oval face very grave, shy and statuesque, had suddenly glided silently from the house to be among us. She was wearing the simplest of white blouses and a purple wrap-over skirt. She looked every inch a dignified, beautiful, aristocratic goddess.'

She was from Rangoon University, the padre explained, had endured sheer hell in escaping from the Japs, and would one day return there. She took Bates to a native dealer in precious stones, not very good ones, and he was enchanted by her talk, her exquisite young face. The inci-

dent duly figured in *The Purple Plain*, in which she became Anna, the padre the doctor, himself Forrester, the shattered RAF pilot with the death-wish.

'The little ideas and pictures I gathered up that morning, the unconsidered trifles, were the genesis of the book.' Yet he had to wait for the vitalising spark till he returned to England and heard of the fighter pilot who 'had more gongs than anyone . . . and got them all for trying to kill himself.' He was dancing in a Leicester Square night club with the girl he'd just married when a bomb hit it, killing scores of people, blowing her out of his arms,

killing her without injuring him. The grievous shock was such that he returned to duty resolved to get himself killed, but instead only succeeded in winning medals.

This was the catalyst Bates needed. 'Some of the white heat of Burma got into my blood as I wrote, so that the words came out as if driven by a blow-torch.' The novel, a great success, was filmed with Gregory Peck as Forrester, an unknown Rangoon girl playing Anna.

On a visit to Tahiti he encountered the original of his story, *Mrs Eglantine*, breakfasting on large brandies—because she had come from Australia to marry a French-

man there, only to find that the Administration had posted him to New Caledonia—evidently deliberately. Back in Kent, a bouncing, laughing family emerging from a village shop to reboard their ramshackle lorry became the Larkins in *The Darling Buds of May* and its Chaucerian sequels.

Bates is a warm, companionable autobiographer. He talks of notable people he met on his varied jobs and travels, sets the scene with lyrical economy, alternates drama with humour, discusses literary techniques, the art of the *novella*. John Ward's free-line drawings enhance the book's intimate appeal.