
NEW NOVEL

THE POACHER. By H. E. BATES. (Cape.
7s. 6d. net.)

There are, as the publisher of "The Poacher" remarks, very few novels of poaching life, and after reading Mr. Bates's extremely attractive story the reader may be inclined to wonder why. The probable answer is that not many of our novelists have Mr. Bates's fine instinct for country life or his peculiar combination of simplicity and deep insight, which permits him to apprehend and present his unsophisticated characters so sympathetically and convincingly.

Luke Bishop is not a poacher all his years or even throughout the whole of the book, but his exploits outside the law are, it is plain, his most satisfying experience, and as it happens they are decisive in shaping his life. Had he not been known as a poacher and the son of a poacher he would probably never have fled from the body of a dead gamekeeper; would probably never have met his wife; and might even, though one doubts it, have been turned into the lawyer his kindly aunt hoped for. But poaching was in his blood, set there by his father Buck, as vivid a character as Mr. Bates has drawn. The years might pass, he patiently working his smallholding while his wife and daughters receded into ever less questionable respectability; but it needed no more than a rabbit racing across a field to revive the old excitement. It is a pity, one tends to feel, turning the last pages, that so few local magistrates—so few of any of us for that matter—have Mr. Bates's imaginative understanding.

Probably it must remain an open question whether this or "The Fallow Land" is Mr. Bates's best novel. The other had obviously larger possibilities; this is in many respects the more strongly and firmly done. It lacks any major woman character, and even among the men only Buck competes for a passing moment with Luke: but the latter is always deftly presented. The poaching adventures are splendidly real, and the pathos of the later years is never forced.