

## THE TWO SISTERS.

A first novel by a young man of twenty, written with amplitude and ease, and showing original and poetic thought is less startling now in England than it would have been a dozen years ago; it was never perhaps startling in France or Russia, where talent flames early, and works of mature thought and workmanship have been produced by writers in their teens. But **THE TWO SISTERS**, by H. E. BATES (Cape, 7s. 6d. net) is an unusual performance; the story is implied rather than chronicled, the characters of the sisters disclose themselves slowly, incomplete until the last page, the setting becomes vaguely real and does not project itself with the definite violence of stage scenery as so often happens in what set out to be "novels of essentials." Jenny and Tessie and their incredible father live in the mind after the book has been laid aside, as people whose names sharpen the attention to the remembrance of poignant things. It is true that the father is supposed to die, but Mr. Bates has not been able to kill him; odious and absurd he survives. Michael Winter, the young lover, is much more securely dead in spite of the loveliness that his memory held for the sisters, keeping the life warm in their bodies many years after he had gone from them.

"The realistic chronicle novel threatens to suffocate us by mere weight," says Mr. Edward Garnett in a critical foreword to the book, which he welcomes for its admirable artistic economy. Probably the confirmed novel-reader is incapable of suffocation; he is, however, susceptible to bewilderment when nothing at all happens, when there is very little story, and when the emotions are so elusively conveyed and the speech so sparing as to leave him in uncertainty as to what is meant. No novelist wants to write only for critics; and when a book is sent out overweighted with praise, the ordinary reader may feel as if he had been warned off. It will be a pity if this is so because, whatever its weaknesses "The Two Sisters" has freshness and great descriptive beauty, and something of the touching inexpressiveness of youth as well.