

A masterly story of a self-made man by H. E. Bates

HAVE said here before that I believe Mr. H. E. Bates to be one of the most interesting literary artists of our time. I have never failed to find delight in his work, in all its stages. Who could fail to do so? For here is a writer with exquisite sensibility towards both life and words; so sensitive, indeed, that he has been driven to case-harden his work with a vigorous worldliness, or the semblance of it, so that his response to his environment should not degenerate into a Keats-like lushness. Especially in his full-length novels, as distinct from his lyrical short stories, has he followed up this intellectual emphasis, this attempt at emotional sophistication. And with increasing maturity, that effort has brought

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with its other developments, unexpected perhaps, like so many of the results of our experiments with ourselves in our attempts to match ourselves against experience. Mr. Bates has found a dry shrewdness, simple in its symbolism, rustic in its form; and this has brought to his work a political and social consciousness as keen as that earlier and more native consciousness with which his five senses responded to the tangibilities of life.

All this is to say that in his new novel, *Spella Ho* (Cape, 8s. 6d.), Mr. Bates displays an impressive maturity. The story is about a man who represents in his life of eighty years the whole growth of a community and of an individual who commands and is representative of that community. The book is about acquisitiveness; money, land, women. Yes, women. For in this tale women play a passively dominating part. We are back in the age of the patriarchs, where women are pleasures and prizes to be striven for and to be disappointed about. This attitude is part of the price Mr. Bates is paying for his excursions into an aggressive materialism. It is only a temporary posture, for behind it can clearly be discerned the artist concerned still to explore the spirit behind the flesh. His sensuality—and that word does not exaggerate the case—has not become master of the artist, and we see him still dissatisfied, still reaching towards a deeper understanding, in spite of his pose of toughness and worldly-wisdom.

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Spella Ho is a great house dominating a small, one-street town in the Midlands. Under its shadow, in a wretched hovel, lives Bruno Shadbolt, twenty years old, unable to read or write, filthy in body and brute-like in mind. He watches his mother die because she has refused to let him steal coal from a dump by the great house. He discovers that his father, a carrier, spends his earnings on a foul and blowsy woman. The simple mind begins to work out a philosophy based on rage and fear. He learns to count small money; he sets out to fend for himself. He thinks he is a fine fellow, dogged and self-making. In fact, he is a slow, massive brute of a man, dependent for ideas and opportunities on the women who come into his life.

Do You Want . . .

. . . *A distinctive novel* :—

* "Spella Ho," by H. E. Bates (Cape, 8s. 6d.).

. . . *An exciting novel* :—

* "Testament," by R. C. Hutchinson (Cassell, 9s.).

. . . *An unconventional novel* :—

"Asleep in the Afternoon," by E. C. Large (Cape, 7s. 6d.).

. . . *An historical novel* :—

"Königsmark," by A. E. W. Mason (Hodder and Stoughton, 7s. 6d.).

. . . *A good biography* :—

* "The Universal Provider," by Richard S. Lambert (Harrap, 10s. 6d.).

. . . *Polar adventure* :—

* "Beyond Horizons," by Lincoln Ellsworth (Heinemann, 12s. 6d.).

. . . *Unusual autobiography* :—

"It's Draughty in Front," by Herbert Hodge (Michael Joseph, 8s. 6d.).

* Reviewed in this issue.

Women are attracted to him, give him all that he demands of them, and pass on. He survives each loss, finding new consolation, new help. Later in life, when he is a rich man, he is engaged to be married to a titled woman of great charm and culture. But he deceives her and returns to an earlier love, a dancing girl of great sexual vivacity. His fiancée drowns herself in the lake by the great house. He ends up as owner of that house, and of half the town, which is now an industrial city. And he ends up alone, unchanged from what he was in youth, except that he is wealthy, and can command respect.



Luigi Pirandello.
(See page 818.)

Mr. Bates, in spite of the power and intensity of this story, has preferred to deal roughly with characterization. He is working on a large scale, elementally, his people types rather than individuals, seen larger than life through a magnifying, warm mist of sensual, mystical passion. I see in the book a fierce conflict between the lyrical poet of the short stories and the socially maturing novelist. That conflict has called out great reserves of power.

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Fru Sigrid Undset's new story, *Images in a Mirror* (Cassell, 7s. 6d.), is a miniature in poignancy. It presents with skill and subtlety that mystery into which middle-aged folk are