

"Daria turned back, swam some twenty feet, then momentarily flung herself out of the water up to her waist, folded her arms behind her head, shouted: 'Good-bye, women!' and went to the bottom like a stone."

Jane Austen might have perpetrated such pathos from the mere embarrassment of being faced with a dramatic situation beyond her scope. But this is not the case with Sholokhov; it is rather an *embarras de tristesse*, the desperation of an author plagued with death-bed scenes.

A. CALDER MARSHALL

THE BEAUTY OF THE DEAD. H. E. BATES.
Cape. 7s. 6d.

READING THIS NEW collection of stories by H. E. Bates, I was as usual filled with admiration for the writer's cool mastery of his medium and at the same time I was puzzled to explain to myself precisely wherein Bates's genius lay. I find that it is easier to say what Bates is not than to describe what he is. For example, Bates is not a philosopher, he does not view life from a new angle. His imagination does not play, like Lawrence's, with an exciting world of physical sensation nor does it, like Kafka's, create its own reality from nightmare. His view of life is very normal. His characters are familiar figures of the countryside and provincial town, the travelling salesman, the small farmer, the little jeweller. Their habits, their speech, and gestures are observed with the meticulousness of Bennett in *The Old Wives' Tale*.

After some moments he remembered the rice pudding. He found the enamel dish warm to his touch. He took it off the kettle and poured a little hot water into the pudding, stirring and mashing it up with a spoon. Then he poured water into the teapot, stirring the stale stewed leaves with his finger.

This passage from *The Beauty of the Dead*, which incidentally is the best of this excellent collection of stories, illustrates his use of small cumulative detail, in order to create character and atmosphere. One is never told all about a person or a place, but as in the art of caricature the whole is suggested by one or two salient features, a man's mouth, the smell of boiled onions, a line of raspberry canes, or the look in a girl's eyes.

It is because Bates's world is a familiar world that this method is so evocative. With a certain word he opens the aperture in our memory where Mr. Penfold or J. Eric Lawrence reside, waiting to be dramatized.

What Bates tells us about these people is nothing that we didn't know. There is no blinding psychological revelation. But we, who know Mr. Grimshaw and Travers quite well, had come to take them for granted. We were, in fact, getting rather bored with them, as we are with those we know merely because they are neighbours or useful in business. Bates, however, is not bored with them; he refreshes our vision; a dozen things we had noted and forgotten or felt irritated at become significant.

Bates's people, however, are far from being the most important element in his work. Literature would not be much poorer for the loss of all his characters. Nor is it again a matter of plot: the anecdotal strain—that part of the story which can be lifted and retold in other words—is not strong. Style is what raises Bates's stories from the commonplace. There is no short-storywriter writing in English to-day who can rival H. E. Bates in delicacy of style. His treatment is almost always thematic. Two, three, four, or five themes are stated;

variations are played on each and from their juxtaposition or separation new patterns are evolved. In *The Beauty of the Dead*, we have the obedient, furniture-loving wife, dying in the cold room, the rice-pudding and stale tea, the snow and the wooden coffin. All of these merge and part and merge again. The snow is the cold killing Mrs. Grimshaw and the soft pall covering all and the white light shining on the new-made coffin. And the food is the parsimony that made the furniture possible and Mrs. Grimshaw's death possible and the ugliness of collecting beautiful things. And the furniture, the treasured work of early master-carpenters is the beauty and hardness of wood, the hardness of the elmplanks that Mr. Grimshaw makes into a coffin, and the coldness of snow, the cold hardness of a dead woman's body, the beauty of the dead.

The art of the short story is to say much in a very little space; and he says most who makes each phrase work twice. There is close kinship between the innuendo of the smokeroom and the symbol of the short story. Bates is lavish in his use of the symbol, the bridge and the lime tree in "The Bridge", the railway and the geranium in "The Loved One", the chrysanthemums in "The Little Jeweller", which readers of *Life and Letters To-day* will remember. Sometimes, as in *Fuchsia*, the symbol is obtruded to make a point which is scarcely legitimate. But usually only the bare surface is exposed, while the emotional roots spread wide below.

In this talking round Bates, what he is and is not, I come to what seems to me to be really the central peculiarity of his work, namely that one never feels very strongly for or against his characters (are not they really also just symbols, like the snow and the

raspberry-canes). The emotion aroused by *The Beauty of the Dead* is almost purely an æsthetic emotion; not poor old Mrs. Grimshaw! or nasty old, pathetic old Mr. Grimshaw! but "Perfect! Exquisite!" It is the pleasure of listening to Mozart, or the delight of holding in one's hand a puppy or a peacock carved by M. Fabergé from a semi-precious stone.

A. CALDER MARSHALL

HAUNTED ENGLAND. CHRISTINA HOLE. Illustrated by JOHN FARLEIGH. Batsford, 10s. 6d.

CURIOSITIES OF TOWN AND COUNTRYSIDE. EDMUND VALE. Illustrated. Batsford. 10s. 6d.

IT IS A strange world into which these two books take the reader. They are dissimilar in substance (the one dealing with manifestation after death, the other only with what is manifested oddly in life). They differ also in style: Mr. Vale's is such as to make his volume a guide-book, whilst Miss Hole's is a history. Yet both owe their fascination not only to what they recount, but to the speculation they arouse as to what lies behind, or beyond.

Miss Hole approaches her subject with respect and with subtlety. At no time does she "betray" her feelings; they are evident, but they are controlled, and though she treads more assuredly the further she leads us into haunted England, it may be said that she will neither antagonize sceptics nor appal believers. Her manner avoids being sentimental on the one hand and "scientific" on the other. This seems to me important, for any suggestion of lack of sympathy