

Pukka Sahibs' Panic

THE JACARANDA TREE. By H. E. Bates. 299 pp. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown & Co. \$2.75.

By FLORENCE CROWTHER

IF a half-hour of fantastic gullery on the radio by Orson Welles could spread panic among the well-fed, well-clothed and presumably educated people of New York and New Jersey, it is small wonder that one hysterical Dutchman was able to inflame with disastrous fear a whole rout of refugees, both natives and colonials, fleeing from Burma to India with the Japanese on their tracks. But in "The Jacaranda Tree," H. E. Bates (an Englishman best known in this country as the author of "Fair Stood the Wind for France" and "The Purple Plain") has written a compelling story around the stark experiences of a small group of people caught in a panic.

Mr. Bates focuses sharply on his two carloads of pilgrims. As the organizer and leader of the group and manager of a large British-owned rice mill, Paterson is aloof, self-contained and extremely efficient. Although he occasions resentment by preferring Burma and the Burmese to his own country and compatriots, nevertheless, in moments of crisis, he "feels very English *** obstinately, phlegmatically, purposefully, deliberately English."

The assorted lot includes Paterson's boy flunky, Tuesday; Nadia, Tuesday's beautiful sister who is equally devoted to Paterson in her own way; the Bettersons—the husband a tyrannical underling in a shipping company, the wife a half-crazed milksop.

As the journey progresses, some, driven by moral obligations, turn back; others, feverish at delay, press ahead into tragedy. Only a pitiful few eventually cross the bridge to make their way to India. Through it all Mr. Bates has not ignored the panorama of the sulphurous countryside over which the group travels. The sounds, the smells, the searing sunlight, the wheeling vultures, the masses of natives, the fruit piles of lime, orange and papaya—these things are brushed in with such artistry that the tale as a whole becomes a living experience for the reader.



H. E. Bates.