

H. E. BATES: *The Scarlet Sword*.  
Michael Joseph. 10s. 6d.

The scene of Mr. Bates's new novel is a Catholic mission in Kashmir, just after the partition of India; the enemy are invading Pathans and Afridis who use the mission as headquarters, and defending Kashmiris who bomb it from British aeroplanes; the victims are the mission's priests and nuns, together with a young war correspondent, a frustrated nurse, an English colonel and his wife, a gauche English girl and her mother, and a prostitute from Bombay. The occupying Pathans murder and rape at intervals throughout the story; the war correspondent and the gauche English girl fall in love; the prostitute proves a true descendant of *Boule de Suif*; fat and unwieldy Father Simpson shows himself as a hero cast in unheroic mould. Why is it that *The Scarlet Sword*, crammed as it is with passionate and pathetic incidents, has so often a flavour of Gilbertian comic opera? Part of the trouble is that in gathering together his random assortment of characters Mr. Bates is using a convention now thoroughly worn out. But the most disturbing weakness of *The Scarlet Sword* is a neglect of characterization, surprising in a writer of Mr. Bates's calibre: since the puppets already mentioned, and half-a-dozen others whose stories are more briefly told, have no inner life and very little past history a reader can feel small interest in their fates,