The Quick Moment

LOVE FOR LYDIA. By H. E. Bates. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 344 pp. $3.50.

By Constance Morgan

IN one sense the title of H. E. Bates's latest work is unusually explicit. This is neither one of his devoted studies of the British countryside nor a story of the war such as "Fair Stood the Wind for France." If this novel is stripped to the bones of its plot, it is simply an account of what love for a young girl named Lydia did to the girl herself and to the four young men who adored her.

One of the young men, Richardson, is the storyteller. Looking through his eyes we see Lydia, seated between her two elderly aunts in the family Daimler, driving for the first time through the gray streets of Evensford, (Northants?) England. With Richardson's rapidly involved emotions we follow her career as the young Miss Aspen of the great house. In Evensford the great house is not "on the hill" but stands like a legendary castle in its own circle of land right in the center of an unromantic, bustling (and in 1929, prosperous) boot-factory town. Lydia enters it as an adolescent whose painful awkwardness belies her actual age, nineteen, and covers a highly developed appetite for life, including sex. Physically she develops quickly into a charmer. It takes her longer to find a love which will fill the abyss left by a prison-like childhood and match her own capacity. In her pursuit she leaves behind her quite a wide track of devastation.

Like the title, this is a liter... deceptive description of Mr. B... novel. It leaves out the best... Lydia is less sensational th... sounds and at the moment of h... velopment upon which Mr. ... focuses, she is more a symbol ... geoning life than a character. ... the object of Richardson's ... friends' love; she is the pivot on ... are hung the gay, agonizing, ... tragic years between nineteen ... twenty-four. In some ways she ... the subject of the book at a ... subject is "growing up" ... strange effects of the passage ... The central figures grow fro... and girls to men and women; ... ripheral ones grow old, and the ... the book, which is as steady ... roll of the seasons which it ... so beautifully, increases one's ... the shifting of generations. There ... violent occurrences in "Lo... Lydia," but they are not isol... cidents thrust up by an individ... heaval. The history of the ... inheritance of a family, the ch... the land itself, and the weat... have their bearing on incide...

It is the nostalgic and sensi... ord of Richardson's increasing ... ness of the "confusion of ... which gives this novel its ... and it is because of this, perh... the last pages seem the leas... ing part of it. The confusions ... solved too neatly. The ... growing up comes to an end ... almost audible click and sud... two human figures seem less ... their own past or the snow... night which surrounds them.