

# With Fatal Results

THE NATURE OF LOVE. By H. E. Bates. 217 pp. Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown. \$3.50.

By JAMES STERN

**M**AKING up "The Nature of Love" are three novellas—"the beautiful and blest *novvelle*," as Henry James called the long story upon which, until very recently, both English and American editors have cast so scornful an eye. Now, with the assistance of the *New Yorker* and the initiative of Mary Louise Aswell, it looks as though the "short novel" may be about to receive the respectful treatment it has so long enjoyed in France and, in better days, Germany and Russia.

As might be expected from his book's title, H. E. Bates' three stories have a common subject: love—or, to be more correct if more melodramatic, all three are stories of "fatal passions." Two, in fact, end in murder. "The Delicate Nature," whose scene is laid on a Malay plantation, is so reminiscent of the work of Somerset Maugham that one is not surprised to find this volume dedicated to the author of "Miss Thompson" and "The Casuarina Tree."

"The Delicate Nature" more than invites, it all but demands comparison with Maugham's earlier short fiction. At his best Mr. Bates can "tell a story" as compellingly as his master. Both men know all the tricks of the trade. But this novella shows that Mr. Bates does not feel quite so at home in the tropics.

Nor does this story of an unloved married woman demanding love from a younger man in order to incite jealousy in her husband, possess that inevitability which carries the reader unquestioning to the climax of a good Maugham story.

Mr. Bates' drama moves too fast; the characters live on the page, but there are moments when one's credulity is strained. Would a woman, however frustrated in her love, throw herself quite so fast and furiously

at the feet of a young man she hardly knows? One doubts it.

Mr. Bates is more English, less cosmopolitan than Maugham. The climate of his native land is in his blood. And at describing its fields and flowers, its birds and beechwoods, England in shimmering spring and the heat of summer, he has, since the death of D. H. Lawrence, no living superior. Both "Dulcima" and "The Grass God" are set in this landscape and in both stories the characters are inseparable from the land. The former is a sordid tale of a poor laborer's daughter, the latter of a wealthy landowner, both caught at turning-points in their lives. "The Grass God," about an unhappily married man whose passion for his acres is interrupted by his meeting an unattached girl, is the more subtle, more convincing of the two, as well as the only story in the book not to end in violent death.

**A** MORE unattractive couple than the brow-beaten Dulcima with her fat legs "hideously knotted with raised blue veins," and the miserly drunken farmer, Parker, with his bundles of money stowed away in biscuit tins in the attic, it would be difficult to imagine. And yet, that these two lonely people could be drawn together by the nature of their lusts (not love) one does not question. What is surely questionable is that a young gamekeeper should suddenly conceive a passion for a painfully ugly girl just because, for the first time in her life, she has bought herself some new clothes and paid a visit to the hairdresser! Likely or not, the consequences are certainly fatal.

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