

A Web of Innocence

"The Golden Oriole," by H. E. Bates (Atlantic-Little, Brown, 204 pp. \$4), a collection of five novellas, deals with amorous, pathetic, sneaky, and touching aspects of English life today. Paul Engle is director of the program in creative writing at the University of Iowa.

By PAUL ENGLE

ALL OF these long tales reveal the unexpectedly complicated motivations of apparently simple people. "The Quiet Girl" is Maisie, a seamstress, described by H. E. Bates like this: "Her face was soft, rather dripping-colored and never really quite healthy in appearance; the skin seemed slightly greasy and the dark hair never quite adequately brushed up; her brown eyes had that downy appearance seen on moth wings."

That little mouse drives one man to suicide while she puts another rejected lover into jail. And all the time she has herself been yearning for a fast-talking, fast-traveling salesman. In the end, her quiet ruthlessness receives a quiet revenge.

Bates has always had a deft hand for the quick, diverting tale, the sort of humor that pleases without depending on pain. "Mr. Featherstone Takes

a Ride" narrates the adventures of an Oxford student hitching a ride with a truck-driver named Niggler. His astonishment begins when Niggler steals two cockerels and delivers them to two ladies at whose house he customarily spends the night when on the road. From then until the end of the ride, when Niggler gently but wickedly extracts five pounds from Featherstone, the education of the Oxford philosophy student proceeds more rapidly than it had at the university. The reader knows that Featherstone, who could ill spare the money, has been generously repaid with an insight into the flip and unscrupulous energy of life, far away from the scrupulous world of exact logic and cold thought.

No one does this sort of thing better than Bates. Although the stories lack the serious intent of his excellent war novel, "Fair Stood the Wind for France," they have an accurate feeling for the cursed human race and a cool concern for pettiness, folly, and moral weakness, a subdued recognition of the desperate needs that excite apparently calm lives.

Perhaps the most touching story is "The Ring of Truth." George Pickard discovers the town in which his pathetic father had found the only emotional solace in his life. He also learns of the dark deception that his mother had committed. Caught thus between