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SEA AIR

THE SAILING RACE. By Patric Dickinson. (Chatto & Windus. 6s.)

By H. E. BATES

SINCE Mr. Patric Dickinson was given an Atlantic Award for literature in 1948 his work has been advancing with sureness and courage into subtler and stronger maturity.

With sureness because he is not only a poet of intricate sensibilities and penetrative vision and word-power but also a very determined one; with courage because if life is not easy, in these skinflint days, for poets who are young, it is perhaps even more difficult for those who, emerging from war with a desperate ache to catch up with living, were shaken to find themselves no longer youthful but still not middle-aged.

The poems in "The Sailing Race" were written on the Sussex coast, in and about—

the marsh where the delicate
wireless masts

Stand for us now, as was the
circle of stones,

Like a fine ship slow-foundering in
a shoal—

and it is not surprising that there is a touch of sea-sound and sea-wing, bristling and fresh and airy, in nearly all of them. It is not surprising either that the fusion of spiritual and material, the jab and jar of steel-world against sea-world, of jet-world against the "deep sea-bed dream of land" should impregnate the thought and sound, often powerfully, on almost every page.

Very long lines dramatically flanking very short ones and the intricate use of internal rhyme do not always make, at first sight, for easy reading; the complete echo of full meaning often comes slowly, "all the more wonderful, the more miraculous," as Dickinson himself says, "in the after silence." But many of these poems are as swiftly acceptable, visually, and as purely entrancing, for all their subtlety, as the sea-washed air of marshland on a summer day.