

Novel Notes

## GOOD THEMES AND BAD

**The Fallow Land.**

By H. E. Bates. 7s. 6d. (Jonathan Cape.)

**H. E. Bates.***Portrait by Yvonne Gregory.***The Laughing Pioneer.**  
By Paul Green.  
7s. 6d. (Gollancz.)**Sons.**  
By Pearl S. Buck.  
7s. 6d. (Methuen.)**Trinc!**  
By Francis  
Watson. 7s. 6d.  
(Dickson.)**Inflexions, 1931.**  
By James Cleugh.  
7s. 6d. (Secker.)**Mutinous Wind.**  
By Robert  
Speaight. 7s. 6d.  
(Peter Davies.)I opened "The  
Fallow Land" ex-  
pectantly. I knew

something of Mr. Bates's reputation as a novelist, though I had read none of his previous work. But I did not expect half the pleasure and satisfaction which I actually experienced. The story begins, as it ends, quietly. Its rise and fall is like the inexorable cycle of the seasons. Between a pre-War and a post-War October, over a period of nearly fifty years, three generations of a farming family live and work and love, marry and quarrel, suffer and die. The story is dominated by the small, tough, determined figure of Deborah. She is the wife of a handsome, brutal drunkard who leaves her, and the mother of the generation which is killed or wrecked by the War. For years she runs the farm alone, more successfully than any man had done, turning her face firmly from all disappointments, knowing that to brood over them would mean disaster. Her life is a series of shattered or dissipated hopes. She is continually faced with situations in which the only choice lies between giving up or going on more desperately with her work. Even death seems to present the same alternative, and she dies with thoughts of the land in her mind, and orders for the ploughing of the fallow field on her lips.

His theme, particularly in its minor incidents, gives plenty of opportunity for the popular sentimental violence. Mr. Bates could have interlarded his story with unnecessary paragraphs of squalor, brutality and lust, without fear of censure and with much hope of praise. But he is artist enough to resist such temptations to distort. Instead he has made a book of such unity and such beauty that it is impossible to isolate any part for especial praise. His mind is able to fuse into a whole the sweet tranquillity of the earth and the bitter struggle of life on the land, which he might easily have been content merely to contrast.

Other novelists, not intent on advanced experiment, would do well to take Mr. Bates's work as a model for their craft. Most of them might learn much from a careful study of his arrangement of narrative and of his sensitive, efficient and thoroughly modern prose. I cannot recommend "The Fallow Land" too strongly to any discriminating reader of novels.