

THE WOMAN WHO HAD IMAGINATION.

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

Among modern English men of letters there are some—two of whom are Mr. A. E. Coppard and Mr. Rhys Davies—who have made the short story their own. By this I mean that, in whatever other fields of literature they have distinguished themselves, they made their arrival and maintain their position by means of the short story. If not the most distinguished of this group, Mr. Bates is the most universal—owing little to Chekhov and Maupassant, and adapting almost all varieties of existence to his original pen. Here he is as versatile as ever, as independent and as human; and his genius for the indirect narrative, begun in "The Two Sisters," is brought to a fine technique.

Moreover the author gives us glimpses of a new Bates—one who, by means of striking comparisons in characterisation and the dexterous use of background, throws up into the daylight points in the story which a less skilful writer would have allowed to become merged in the general background of shadow. Hitherto, as in "The Day's End" and "The Fallow Land" (both in some ways superior to this work) we have only had hints of this remarkable technique; but here it comes forth in a full and conscious embodiment. "The Water Fall," "The Brothers," "The Lily" and "The Woman Who Had Imagination" itself are all fair examples of this particular type of portraiture.

There is however less fire in this volume than in Mr. Bates's earlier work, and I missed the unconscious beauty, the passionate inevitability and economical austerity of "The Day's End." Possibly too his refusal to be governed by any one school has resulted in the domination of too many minor influences in a small space. There are tastes here of Boccaccio, Henry James, Flaubert, Pushkin, Lawrence and David Garnett—all those who, while possessing few conscious disciples, have made the short story in Europe what it is. Nevertheless these are but tastes; and when such pieces have been digested, we are left with a larger taste in our minds—the technique of an author whose inspiration is original.

Ashley Sampson