

Burma Road

MR. H. E. BATES might very well have been a painter. His sensitivity both to colour and its vibrations and to form and its plasticity is extraordinarily acute. And, through the words which he has preferred above pigment for his medium, he communicates it with an extraordinary potency. In *The Jacaranda Tree* (JOSEPH, 9/6) he assaults not only our sense of sight but all the others. It is the story, very simple in structure, though complex enough in the emotional problems involved, of the flight, before the Japanese menace, of a handful of English men and women, a Eurasian girl and a couple of Burmese children, out of Burma to the safety of India. It is a story, therefore, of the toil and perils of the road, of an arduous trek through dust and heat, through a vivid and changing landscape and a pulsating stream of anonymous humanity. The sensual atmosphere is sometimes quite terrific in its intensity, and there are moments, when, for instance, vultures are of the party, that will give little comfort to the squeamish. But, after all, it is also and mainly a story of definite persons, their private fears and desires, their jealousies and prejudices and exasperations. Some of them are memorable: the feckless and ridiculous Mrs. Betteson, who comes so magnificently up to scratch; the Eurasian girl; and the Burmese brother and sister—Tuesday, with his intelligence and bewilderment and loyalty, and Nadia who, with barely a speaking part, is in a manner the leading lady of the drama.

F. B.