

The Poacher
The Jacaranda Tree
The Darling Buds of May!

The Purple Plain
The Wind for France

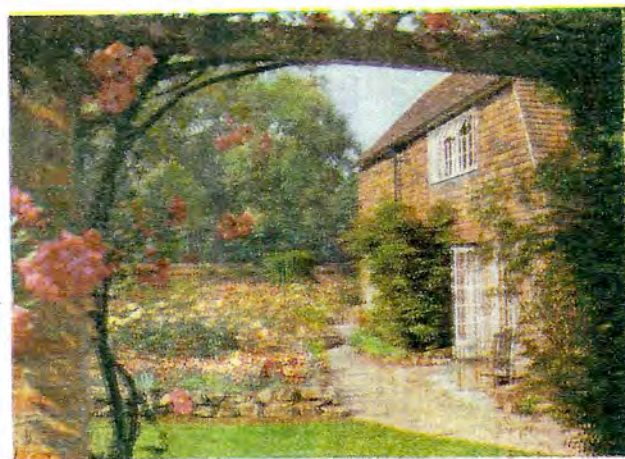
The Two Sisters

Love for Lydia

A summer's day . . . the subtle
perfume of roses drifting across the
lawn, through open French
windows, into the sitting room

H.E.

A young couple walked the lovely lanes of Kent
looking for a home, and couldn't resist — a
granary! They married, and moved in . . .



In an old notebook I found that on May 4th, 1937, "when the oaks were still in young gold leaf and the ash trees not yet out, the country lovely under fruit blossom," my wife and I motored over to dine with Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Bates at Little Chart, in Kent. This was the beginning of a friendship that has lasted, and deepened, for over twenty years.

The entry continues: "H.E.—as he likes to be called—took us to see the nests of chaffinch, thrush, and long-tailed tit; we stood on a bridge over the Stour, watching small trout finning against the stream," and, significantly, "excellent dinner cooked by Mrs. Bates: minestrone, roast chicken, delicious caramel cream, first-class wine, coffee, liqueurs. Delightful evening." ▶▶

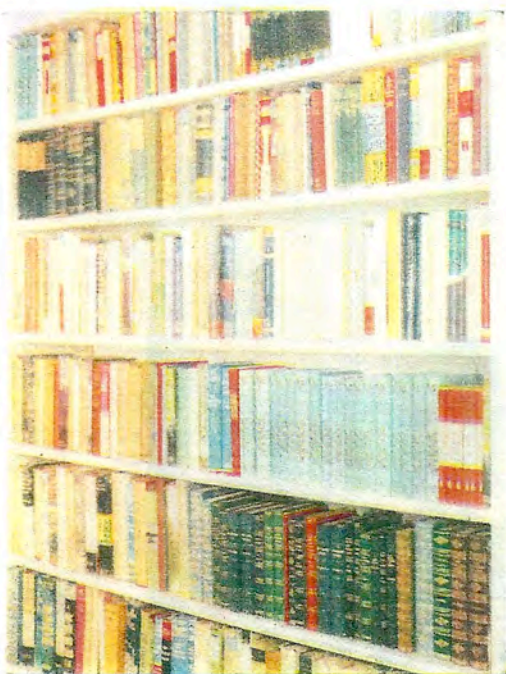


Where is H.E.? Inevitably—in the garden! Since he bought a wilderness acre, more than twenty-five years ago, his very green fingers have been endlessly creating the delight that has become The Granary garden. Lately he has

concentrated on orchids, and now has many exquisite blooms to show in the newly erected greenhouses. Being a practical owner-gardener, he takes a countryman's pride in keeping the kitchen well supplied with vegetables and fruit



H. E. Bates, Prince of story-tellers



H. E. Bates, a countryman, has never lacked sophistication in the best sense, or worldly knowledge; he is extremely well and widely informed. He hates false smartness and is never really happy for long in cities, for he finds the life there brittle. He was born in 1905 in the small town of Rushden where his father was in the staple trade of shoemaking.

Living close to the soil taught Bates things he could have learnt in no school, such as his sensuous, poetic, yet precise appreciation of nature. He grew up between two river valleys, the Ouse and the Nene, where he got to know the ways of poachers and gamekeepers, and where he learned how to fish and skate. He won a scholarship to Kettering Grammar School, and was good at football, wondering at one time whether he should become a professional soccer player or a writer!

A short, hated spell as a provincial journalist was followed by a job as a clerk in the office of a leather warehouse, where he spent his time tying up parcels and writing surreptitiously, and at the age of twenty his first novel *The Two Sisters* was published. This book about a girl's first love was written so sensitively that Edward Garnett, who first discovered it, had supposed it to be written by a woman and had addressed the letter of acceptance to "Miss Bates."

Bates married a girl from his own town, and they came south to live at Little Chart where he had bought an acre of land and "a sturdy Kentish granary of stone and tile" and modernised it. Here there was peace, not only to write, but to become an expert gardener and the village cricket captain.

Mr. and Mrs. Bates were to bring up a happy family of four children: Ann, Judith, Richard and Jonathan. In these early days Edward Garnett, his advisor and friend,

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All by the same author. H. E. Bates' books have been translated into nearly twenty languages, including Braille. His publishers have established a very pleasant tradition by presenting their best-selling author with a special leatherbound copy of each book as it is issued. The long line lengthens next month with "A Breath of French Air"

Richard, the elder son, works in a London publishing house, but spends weekends at home. In his room there is still part of his boyhood cacti collection;

Friends love to hear the story of the two ladies peering into what they thought was an old, disused and uninhabited granary, only to behold to their astonishment a young couple obviously "at home", sitting having tea—on cherry boxes!





The dining room was once a stable, but the structure of the beams is now the only remaining indication, so cleverly has the conversion been contrived. The original half-doors of the stable are now a feature of the garage

The main bedroom, reflecting the light and shade and loveliness of the garden. The Granary might well be described as a house of flowers: Mrs. Bates shares her husband's enthusiasm for the garden, expressed in her loveliest of flower arrangements in every room



H. E. Bates

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was invited to visit the young couple, but feared that Mrs. Bates might prove some *femme fatale* who would ruin his protégé's future! He was charmed, and reassured.

During the war Bates became known to thousands of new readers for his stories, written under the pseudonym of "Flying Officer X", of the crews of bombers and fighters of the R.A.F. And in *The Cruise of the Breadwinner* he wrote a great sea story. Later he went to Burma and India, and there followed *The Purple Plain* and *The Jacaranda Tree*. The first, a great success, was made into a film and the script kept close to the book—it was a different story with the filming of *The Darling Buds of May*!

To-day, at fifty-four, H.E.'s hair has receded and looks silky and white. As he often writes in an open summerhouse in the garden from early morning until lunch-time, his complexion is red and outdoor. He is stocky, with short arms and small practical hands. All the Bates family are fair, with small features, and both blue-eyed married daughters have a striking fragile beauty. H.E.'s lips are most expressively sensitive, but it is his blue eyes that give away inner secrets. He has said: "I carry stories around in my mind sometimes for more than two years, until they finally come to life." His eyes grow dreamy, concerned with his brooding vision; then they suddenly light up with a wonderful warmth of genial kindness; or twinkle, wickedly alive with the fruity humour of "My Uncle Silas," the only character he has lifted straight from life.

The Bates' beautiful home has lately been enlarged by the addition of two wings. It is a house furnished in exquisite taste.

If we may judge by several of his latest books: *The Nature of Love*, *The Feast of July*, *The Daffodil Sky* and *The Sleepless Moon*, *Watercress Girl* and *Darling Buds*, he has returned to writing chiefly about the country. He has always reacted sensuously, almost physically, to the world of light and colour, is passionately interested in the truth about life, and in writing of simple men and women on farm and field, in factory and shop, with deep insight and compassion. The flavour of his work is sometimes pungent, yet often as sweet as the Kentish countryside that surrounds him.

Now the garden and The Granary have become such a delight that Mr. and Mrs. Bates, for the first time for many years, are spending the entire summer at home, enjoying the fragrance of a thousand roses, and the company and seemingly incessant chatter of their four grandchildren.