



Book-lined Study in H. E. Bates's Kentish home shows his wide taste in reading. Leather-bound classics jostle modern novels beside volumes on gardening and art



Local Fishing is one of author's chief relaxations. Such unhurried hobbies as this and gardening help him to ponder the novels which have brought him fame here and in U.S.A.

WORDS ARE HIS EXPORT

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMES JARCHÉ

DESCRIBED BY CHARLES HAMBLETT

One of Britain's big dollar earners is H. E. Bates who has just finished a new novel in his quiet country home

THE countryman looked uncertain as he echoed my question. "The Granary? Don't rightly know," he said. He was beginning to shake his head when, suddenly, his eyes became friendly.

"Ah, you must be looking for Mr. Bates's place," he said. "Like as not you'll find him fishing at this hour," he added, and directed me a few hundred yards down the hot Kentish lane.

It was as good an introduction as any to H. E. Bates, who, at the age of forty-three, has spun the rich fabric of half a dozen best sellers in as many years. Although, in a more materialistic society than that of a small village, he has been called "The Dollar Novelist," down in Kent where he lives with his wife and four children, he is plain Mister Bates, the man who has a snug house near the pond, and spends his spare time fishing and working in his garden.

The spare, greying man with alert eyes and a lazy way of walking, who met me at the wrought-iron gate, fitted neatly into the country landscape. This was the man who, before he became known to the world as Flying Officer X through his chronicles of the R.A.F., wrote short stories that hovered between realism and a lyrical interpretation of ordinary life.

Bates was discovered by Edward Garnett, the critic, while still in his teens. He lists his favourite authors as Tchekhov, Shaw, Ibsen, Maupassant, Hemingway, Joyce and Conrad, and his early work displays the somewhat uneasy influence of Conrad's indirect method of narrative. Garnett wrote the preface to his first book, *The Two Sisters*, which was published when he was twenty-one years old. For the next ten years Bates reviewed books, wrote newspaper articles and won a solid reputation as a fiction writer.

With the war, his vision enlarged. He was commissioned as an R.A.F. officer in the autumn of 1941 and sent to a bomber station to write down what he saw. It was typical of the R.A.F.'s

disregard of tradition that it should use a writer as a writer, and set him to work on some of the finest material in the world.

Bates wrote of the invigorating life as he lived it in the mess, at dispersal points, in the local pub. His style remained clear and unaffected, the work of a restrained, sensitive personality. Herbert Ernest Bates, grandson of a labourer, had become one of the established writers of English prose.

His prose pays dividends, too. His last novel, *The Purple Plain*, set in wartime Burma, has sold 850,000 copies, and has brought many thousand dollars to this country. After being serialized in a leading American magazine, it was recommended by the Literary Guild of America, which ensured it a sale of 500,000 copies, apart from regular sales.

The book is to be produced as a film by David Lean, who made *Great Expectations*, and it will eventually be reprinted in cheap editions. Bates's previous book, *Fair Stood the Wind for France*, which tells the story of an English bomber crew adrift in occupied France, sold 400,000 copies in America and earned about seventy-five thousand dollars. Statistics of other sales, including film rights, read like a stockbroker's favourite dream.

"My ambitions," Bates says, "are to visit each of my publishers in Europe, to write a successful play, and to collect more and more pictures." Even before the war he visited America and foreign countries to discuss business with publishers, agents and editors. Combining globe-trotting with business is a favourite form of travel with him.

His second ambition is, at present, more elusive. His R.A.F. play, *The Day of Glory*, recently produced in London, was praised for its fine emotional dialogue, but, as one critic put it, seemed to cool as it crossed the footlights. But he is still interested in dramatic writing, in making people talk aloud, and will probably produce a really effective play.

The collection of pictures has always attracted Bates. His rooms are stocked with rare paintings.

Favourite artists are Bonnard, Renoir, Constable, Turner, Pissarro and Marie Laurencin—all painters with a lively, informal eye. He believes that painting and writing should be closer to each other—that writers, like painters, should write more with the eye, in the open air, and less at the desk.

He also believes that films and writing have much to teach each other. For a countryman of his reserved disposition, he shows an unusual interest in film making. In addition to the projected filming of three of his novels, he is also writing an original story for David Lean.

Bates's newest novel, *The Jacaranda Tree*, which he has just completed, may be added to the film list when it is published next autumn. Like *The Purple Plain*, this new book is set in Burma. The jacaranda tree of the title grows in the garden of a white planter who remembers it during the Japanese invasion as a symbol of faith.

Why are H. E. Bates's novels successful? He does not deliberately aim at the best-seller market. His themes are chosen with complete disregard for current literary trends. (When *The Purple Plain* appeared, critics and publishers had decided that war subjects were played out.)

The answer may lie in his great sincerity. Toughness, integrity, a sense of danger and adventure condition the themes and characters of his stories. Not the hoodlum toughness of slick fiction, but the hard resistance of men against a common enemy. There is also sentiment, something which the metallic writers of today tend to ignore. Lastly, there is courage.

Bates speaks the language of the new generation, a language fashioned by war and swift transcontinental migrations. The man who once said: "I believe that the power of man's security, unless he is halt, maimed, or blind, is within himself"—that man is qualified to speak for those who, by the nature of their training, prefer to restrict themselves to slangy inarticulations.



In Summer-house, H. E. Bates works on new novel, *The Jacaranda Tree*. He writes every morning from nine until one, five days a week, always using pad on knee, never at desk



Old-fashioned Flowers grow in profusion under his "green fingers" and he spends hours in his greenhouse. His love of gardening has been expressed in *Flowers and Faces*

At His Home in Kent, the garden influences Bates's life and writing. During his time in R.A.F., which produced his war books written as Flying Officer X, his chief delight when on

leave was, he says, to have supper with his children after working in the garden. As a result, he joined both loves by writing children's book, *The Seasons and the Gardener*

