

ADOPTED COUNTY

H. E. BATES: *The Country of White Clover*. Drawings by Broom Lynne. Michael Joseph. 12s. 6d.

Mr. H. E. Bates combines two literary reputations which show no sign of diminishing, for the technical skill on which they are based grows more assured as he matures. This book is a contribution from that side of him which is known to readers of country books. He is a master in this kind. He never sentimentalizes, and his observation is always concrete. When he writes about gardens and gardening he is practical and informative. In analysing the country characters he does so as one among them not too superior to be moved to prejudice and even rage. It is very human, and therefore most acceptable. He never indulges in that infuriating trick, a vocational snob trick, of writing about country folk as though they were creatures of a different order from townspeople, and especially the literary townsman.

It is thus no demerit in him that when he discusses the natives of Kent, the county to which he has migrated from Northamptonshire, he has some harsh words for these descendants of the Jutes, accusing them of boorishness, a hideous dialect, meanness and hostility towards strangers, bitterness and treachery among themselves. He has lived among them for 20 years, so he ought to know. But the odd thing is that after all these strictures the men and women of the Weald and the Downs

are living in these pages, flesh and blood beings whom we meet and come into conflict with, liking them in spite of their tribal idiosyncrasies. He reproduces the strange sounds of their speech, and we recognize it as authentic, and curiously similar to the clipped, clotted syllables spoken on the islands of Zealand and Funen by Danish farming folk.

The author's love for Kent is profound, almost mystical. There is no contemporary writer more capable of putting such an emotion into simple, sensuous prose. Thus this little book hymns the county in such a way that every one of its features is particularized, from the "cheese-green lumps of Kentish ragstone" with which its village churches are built, to the special quality of its welkin, when in late spring "by afternoon too the wind stills down, and the air, warming every moment, becomes in a curious way hollow rather than quiet, a sort of glass bell in which the voices of birds keep up a high sustained vibration of echoing sweetness, a thing especially true of stuttering cuckoos and the deep round-blown notes of blackbirds."

So through the year and its seasons in this sea-belted county Mr. Bates lives with a full and appreciative joy and high discontent: grumbling, revelling, working and idling; then coming down to his art, to report the common adventure in terms of a prose that is as virile as the climate which engendered it.