

Books of The Times

By CHARLES POORE

WHILE other novelists are wringing their hands and saying that this is no time to write, H. E. Bates is writing. While other novelists are howling over the perilous state of current affairs, H. E. Bates is telling the eternal tales of private lives. While other novelists are vicariously saving the world, H. E. Bates is quietly and expertly helping to keep



H. E. Bates

alive the art of story-telling. He has been doing that since he was 20, in the Nineteen Twenties, only taking time out, in the Nineteen Forties, to serve as a R. A. F. squadron leader, and, like as not, writing a book or two when he wasn't leading any squadrons. His new novel—it must be his twentieth book, or thereabouts—is called "Love for Lydia."* It is a story of young men and women growing up in the English Midlands

between the wars, falling in and out of love with one another, with themselves, with the English country and the English ways, and—most particularly—with Lydia.

The story is told from the point of view of the young man who was most in love with Lydia, and who came to feel that he had suffered most at her hands. But it is also the story of a whole generation, a generation Evelyn Waugh writes about at another level, the level of what you might call the self-winding, self-made patricians, born with an awful thirst for the manor.

The patrician element here is represented by Lydia—though, being a spirited girl, she takes that consideration pretty lightly. The truth of the matter is that Lydia really deserved something better out of life than the cluster of sad sacks around her. While she is trying to live with spendthrift splendor, they measure out their lives with coffee spoons. Naturally, then, she is locally regarded, in the English midlands, as a sort of rusticated Iris March, the mad young mistress of a seedy dynasty.

Heroine Dances Down the Pages

The hero of this story, if we must call him that, Richardson, a botany-struck nature lover, watches Lydia's descent on his town of Evesford with proper awe. Has she not arrived in a great, sumptuous family car? Is she not living in the great Aspen house that has stood in its own great park for centuries? When Lydia's eccentric aunts ask him to take her skating, he glows with joy; when he has a chance to take her dancing, he wallows in enchantment.

The skill and subtlety of Mr. Bates' story-telling is such that we are happy to let Richardson worry about himself and his own future and Lydia's clouded past while we enjoy the pleasure of watching Lydia dance down the pages. Naturally, she makes Richardson look, as well as feel, silly; she does as much for at least two others, Alex Sanderson and Tom Holland. They come to very sad ends because of

the prevailing love for Lydia. In fact, we haven't had such a compelling heroine in a long time.

Out of kindness for Richardson, perhaps, Mr. Bates gives us immense helpings of local Evesford scenery in all seasons. There are times when you feel that Richardson never misses the blooming of a single daisy or the look of a lime or a walnut tree. Instead, he completely misses the fact that he frequently bores the lovely Lydia stiff. And, what with his sorrow for himself, it takes him a long time to see her truer, deeper sorrow.

As a practiced storyteller, Mr. Bates does not hesitate to use the ancient wiles of his art. He collaborates amiably with coincidence. When he wants to pen his characters up for a crucial confrontation, he whistles up a suitable storm. When a character has to be sent out of the gathering, he goes in search of a telephone; when the same character, a little later, has to be reached by phone in the same house, we are blandly told that a telephone has meantime been installed.

Naturally, it is one of those very serious, you-mustn't-stay-too-long-this-time illnesses that brings Lydia and her surviving swains on stage together again. You won't mind any of that. Lydia is worth meeting, worth any amount of understanding. The other characters are merely at "Lydia's—and the reader's—beck and call. What this solemn year needs is more heroines like Lydia.

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Three-Minute Anthology

From "With Malice Toward Women," an entertaining, resolutely misogynous anthology dedicated, for reasons that elude us, to the documentation of Thurber's war between the sexes:

"As the faculty of writing has been chiefly a masculine endowment, the reproach of making the world miserable has been always thrown upon the women."—Dr. Johnson.

"I will tell the truth about women only when I have one foot in the grave. I will tell it, jump into my coffin, pull the lid over me and say: 'Now you may do what you like.'"—Count Tolstoy.

"Even when they meet in the street women look at each other like Guelphs and Ghibellines."—Schopenhauer.

"The appointment of a woman to office is an innovation for which the public is not yet prepared, nor am I."—Thomas Jefferson.

"When the Himalayan peasant meets the he-bear in his pride,
He shouts to scare the monster who will often
turn aside;
But the she-bear thus accosted rends the peasant
tooth and nail,
For the female of the species is more deadly
than the male."—R. Kipling.

"The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of a tyranny over her."—Manifesto of the Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848.

†WITH MALICE TOWARD WOMEN. Compiled by Justin Kaplan. Illustrated with James Thurber's "War Between Men and Women" drawings. 255 pages. Dodd, Mead. \$3.

*LOVE FOR LYDIA. By H. E. Bates. 344 pages. Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$3.50.