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# An Eye for Beauty

*THE YEAR RETURNS. By Elizabeth Hamilton. (Michael Joseph. 15s.)*

*By H. E. BATES*

**M**ISS HAMILTON'S book is composed of a series of impressions, almost prose-poems, forming a record of some years spent at Longleat, the famous Tudor house of the Marquis of Bath. She was not there by choice; she was one among many who found themselves billeted in a great house simply through the accident of war.

In this isolation she turned to the countryside, to the garden and its flowers, the park and its lake, and above all the birds. It is the birds, in fact, that are really the characters of her book, and her pictures of them have an astonishing stained-glass brilliance, shot through with a light of fidelity and affection.

## Power of Sight

**T**HE secret of her genius in this is two-fold. She has a high natural gift of observation, together with a remarkable sense of atmosphere and place. Her power of sight is so extraordinary that it is not impossible that she constantly sees, as Leonardo is said to have done, details that to the rest of us are not there. The other part of herself has been shaped by classical scholarship; her mind seeks accuracy and is trained. The result of this combination is that she is never carried away into fulsomeness, and only once into anything like sentimentality. The effect of her pages is at once visionary and scientific, and neither quality is ever obtrusive.

She has two idiosyncrasies of style, apart from its brilliance of colour, that give her book a sharp personal quality. She refers to all her birds with capital letters, thus giving her pages a certain eighteenth-century look; and she has a great fondness for the double-barrelled adjective, sometimes using as many as twenty-five on a page, together with some treble-barrels and quadruples. The curious thing is that this habit does not irritate. It is obviously the expression of a mind trying to resolve, with restless subtlety, those rare half-tones and quarter-values of light and colour that her eye picks up. They too are the key to the poet in her, giving her book exceptional translucence and beauty.