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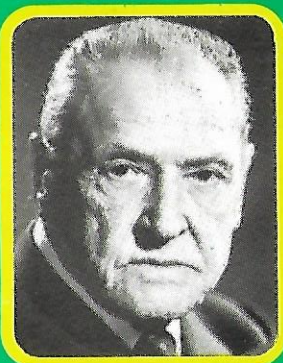
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H.E. BATES
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H. E. BATES

ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S
FAVOURITE STORYTELLERS,
WHOSE PRE-WAR WORK IS
NOW FETCHING HIGH PRICES

BY D.C. HOGG



One of the most accomplished and successful writers of modern times, H.E. Bates produced more than one book a year in a career that spanned almost 50 years. He was also a master of the short story, writing over five hundred. His books have been translated into 16 different languages, and have been made into films and television plays; and his short stories are regularly broadcast on the radio. The range of his writing was so wide that his books can be subdivided into different categories to enable the beginner or specialist collector to concentrate on one particular aspect of his works. These divisions would include collections of short stories, country essays, war books, the 'Larkin Family' books, and books adapted for films and TV.

H.E. Bates (the initials stand for Herbert Ernest) was born in 1905 in the Northamptonshire town of Higham Ferrers, where for generations his family had been involved in the boot and shoe trade. He left school at the age of 16 and found employment as an assistant reporter with the Northampton Chronicle. After a short, unhappy period (but one which proved useful for some later stories), he left to become a clerk. At the age of 17 he wrote a novel which was not published; but the experience left him determined to continue with a writing career. A year later he began writing the novel "The Two Sisters"; after several drafts he submitted the final version to ten different publishers before Jonathan Cape accepted it and launched his professional career. "The Two Sisters" is still in print after 50 years, but first editions in good condition are hard to find and can cost about

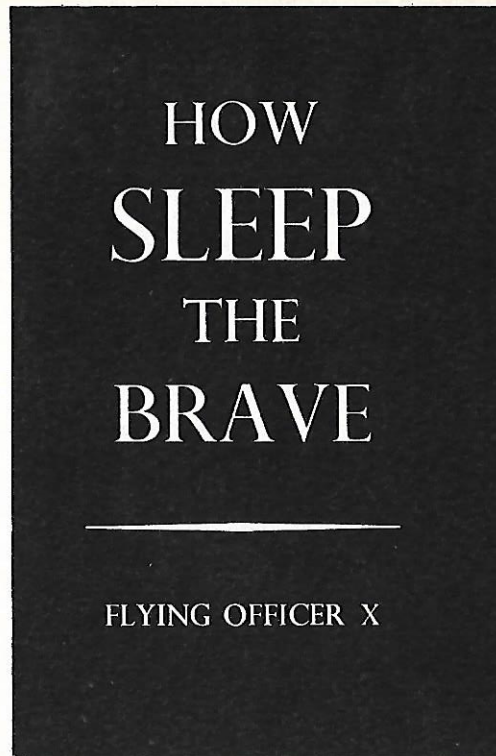
£75. Like most young full-time writers, Bates found living by his writing a struggle at first, but in the 1930s there were many more outlets for the short story form than there are today, and he quickly became an acknowledged master.

The strength of these stories lies in Bates' ability to paint a pastoral scene with words, evoking his deep love of the English countryside. His characters were always authentic and he was a master at portraying the feelings of rural people. A good example of his range and style can be found in a collection of 11 of his early short stories entitled "The Black Boxer". The theme of each is different, catering for those who like idyllic, tragic or humorous stories. During the period 1926-1939 he published seven novels - "The Two Sisters" (1926) "Catherine Foster" (1929), "Charlotte's Row" (1931), "Fallow Land" (1932), "The Poacher" (1935), "A House Of Women" (1936), and "Spella Ho" (1938). The proofs of "Spella Ho" were sent to America, and almost immediately the book was pub-

lished and a sum of 5000 dollars accepted for the serialisation in the 'Atlantic Monthly' magazine. The prestige was immense and the money was, according to Bates in his autobiography, "the equivalent of the discovery of a gold mine at the bottom of the garden". In the period before the war, he also wrote essays on country life and, in particular, collaborated with an excellent woodcut artist, Agnes Miller Parker, to produce "Through The Woods" (1936) and "Down the River" (1937). Both these books are much sought after in VG condition and cost around £12.

PSEUDONYM

The advent of war brought another change to H.E. Bates' career and further enhanced his reputation. When drafted into the R.A.F. to write about the lives of the men and women who served their country, he produced, under the pseudonym 'Flying Officer X', two books of short stories entitled "How Sleep the Brave" and "The Greatest People in the World". Both these books were published in paperback form by the British Publishers Guild in conformity



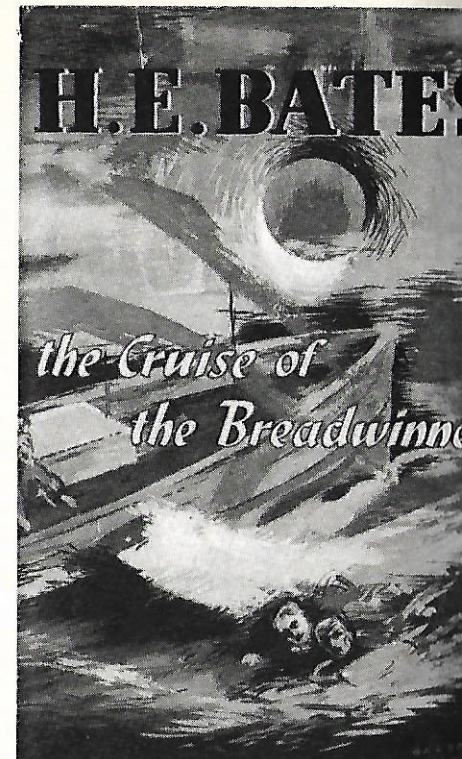
During the Second World War Bates wrote two short books under the pseudonym Flying Officer X

with economy standards due to the Government's strict control of paper. Recently I found two good paperback copies of "How Sleep The Brave" (1943) side by side in an antique shop. They were 20p each. Hardback editions are much more difficult to find.

In 1943 the novel "Fair Stood the Wind for France" was published and was an immediate best-seller in Britain and America. The American writer Henry Miller, a stern critic of British authors, has written that he considers "Fair Stood the Wind for France" to be the only good novel he has read about World War II. The film director David Lean ("Bridge on the River Kwai", "Doctor Zhivago", "Lawrence of Arabia") obviously agreed, as he bought the film rights of "Fair Stood the Wind for France", "The Cruise of the Breadwinner" and "The Purple Plain".

Later in the war Bates, now a Squadron Leader, visited the Far East. His extensive travel there provided material for two

novels, "The Purple Plain" and "The Jacaranda Tree". ("The Purple Plain" was later made into a film starring Gregory Peck.) Another popular war story was "The Cruise of the Breadwinner", which was an intensely moving story about a trawler crew and was compared to Conrad's "Typhoon" by the critic James Agate. After the war Bates took some time to discover his true form, but found it eventually with the novel "Love for Lydia" (1952). For the first time in his career, he turned his attention to autobiographical incidents he remembered from his short journalistic career. As a nervous young reporter he had gone on an assignment to a large house; for a fleeting moment he saw a beautiful young girl in a black cloak lined with scarlet arrive at a station in a pony drawn gig to catch a train — these two brief incidents combined to create a famous story about youth and its ecstasies and uncertainties. "Love for Lydia" was later made into a memorable television series. It was apparent that Bates' stories were perfectly suited for the small screen, and another television series entitled "Country Tales" featured several of Bates' short stories.



"The Cruise of the Breadwinner", published 1946, sells for about £5 in its original dust jacket

During the 1950s he continued to write about his love of the country and produced more essays such as "The Country of Wiltshire" (1952) and "Face of England" (1952). Good short stories also continued to flow, but then, quite unexpectedly at the age of 58, he entered another phase when he invented the Larkins family. They were funny, rude, taxdodging, immoral lot with adventures started in "The Darling Bud" (1958) and were followed up by another four novels: "Breath of French" (1959), "When the Green Woods Laugh" (1960), "Oh To Be In England" (1963), "A Little of What You Fancy" (1970). This series became one of his greatest popular successes.

The theatre was one area that Bates was desperately keen to master and although he had dabbled in writing one-act plays some time, it was not until 1945 that he wrote "The Day of Glory". This was initially performed in London, but due

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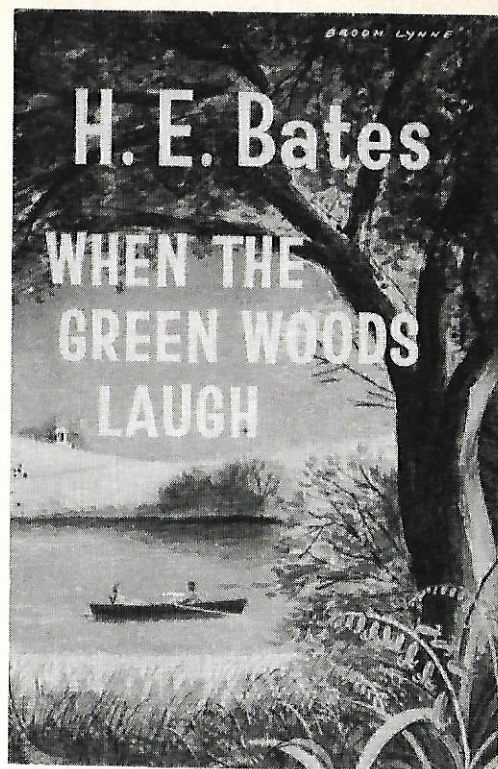
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the hostility of the critics it was not a commercial success. After further forays into playwriting (which produced two more full-length plays that were never performed), he acknowledged that the theatre was not his medium, and returned to more rewarding areas.

TEXTURE

In 1969 Volume 1 of Bates' autobiography, "The Vanished World", was published, producing a delighted response from his former critics. The 'Spectator' summed up the general response: "Few writers have a more exact feel for the texture of a flower, a face, a silence, and it is this that has value". The cost of this book in 1969 was £2.50, and today copies can be found on bookstalls for about £10. This was followed in 1970 by another novella, "The Triple Echo", which was first published as a three-part serial in the colour magazine of the Daily Telegraph. The story was first conceived in 1943, but it was not until 1968 that Bates finally worked out the plot. It is the story of a lonely woman whose husband is a prisoner of war, and who convinces an army deserter to disguise himself as her



"When The Green Woods Laugh", published in 1960, is one of the more common Bates titles.

sister. The plan goes well until a sadistic sergeant enters the scene, but their deception is discovered, and the climax is chilling. A successful film adaptation of "The Triple Echo" starred Glenda Jackson and Oliver Reed.

Bates was fascinated by the art of the novella and was first drawn to it by Conrad's "Youth: Heart of Darkness". Throughout his career he continued to read such writers as Tolstoy, Maupassant, James Joyce, Hemingway and D.H. Lawrence, all brilliant exponents of this art.

NOVELLAS

Against the advice of his publisher he produced a volume called "The Nature of Love" containing three novellas. This sold extremely well, with one story, "Dulcima", being made into a film in 1971. In all, he produced more than 20 novellas, all well worth collecting and reading. He completed his autobiography with "The Blossoming

World" (1971) and "The World In Ripeness" (1972), both admirably illustrated by John Ward. In 1973 H.E. Bates was awarded the O.B.E. In 1974 the year of his death at the age of 68, a book entitled "Fountains of Flowers" (photographs by Patrick Matthews) was published, followed in 1976 by a book of short stories called "Yellow Meads of Asphodel".

Bates left behind him a literary reputation as one of the finest short-story writers of his generation, a reputation which is beginning to be reflected in the prices commanded by some of his work. Of particular interest to collectors are several items he wrote for the Golden Cockerel Press. "A German Idyll" (1932) and "The House with the Apricot" (1933) are worth about £30 today, along with "Flowers and Faces" (1935),

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IN MOST AREAS

which contains engravings by John N. Two further particularly collectable items are limited, signed editions of "Sally Round the Moon" (1932) and "The Story Without an End" (also 1932) and all these fetch about £30 each today.

H.E BATES BIBLIOGRAPHY

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