STORIES BY H. E. BATES

DAY'S END. By H. E. Bates. 286 pp. New York: The Viking Press. $2.

WHEN "The Two Sisters" appeared, critics hailed its young author, H. E. Bates, as a star of first magnitude in the English literary firmament. He was the find of Edward Garnett, who discovered Galsworthy, Conrad and W. H. Hudson. Thus Mr. Bates's second book, "Day's End," comes to a public prepared for and expectant of something important in these twenty-five short stories.

The long first story, from which the book takes its title, is of Israel Rentshaw, whose seventy years are drawing to an end. Due to ill fortune, he has been a failure as a farmer. His daughter, Henrietta, has long wanted him to move into the village. His rented farm is about to be sold. Indecision as to what to do—whether to try to buy the farm or give it up—heart attacks and passing days bear down on him heavily. At last he comes to his day's end. The story is beautifully felt, but heavy at times with a useless tautology—Henrietta was "homely and plain-looking."

"The Baker's Wife" is the story of Janet, who, "in spite," had married an avaricious baker after a quarrel with her lover for a "tragically insignificant cause." Janet and her husband have a stall at the Burton Fair. The former lover appears. She tells him her troubles, but refuses to meet him. He helps her find her drunken husband whom they lift into the trap, and Janet drives him home. She is reckless about it and her husband calls to her to be careful. Her anger cools as she realizes she might have had an upset and killed him.

"The Easter Blessing" is the story of Helena, a doctor's wife who is decorating the nave of a church with flowers for an early Easter service. A woman comes into the church. Helena learns that she is starving. Instead of taking the woman home with her for hot food, she tells the woman to remain where she is until she gets back. Her husband inquires as to the cause of her hurry and she tells him: "Don't keep me! There's a heap of flowers still lying on the altar; the service will begin and I'm late." He offers to help with the flowers, but she refuses his aid—neither does she send him to the starving woman or tell him about her, or do any of the things most people who are able to think in an emergency would naturally do. When she gets back to the church the verger is clearing away the unarranged flowers she has left, the service is about to begin and the woman is gone. At the close of a busy day the husband comes home and reports: "A suicide in Low Pond. Imagine how annoyed I was to be dragged from one end of the town to the other and then be quite useless. * * * Yes, it was really not only annoying, but quite nauseating. A woman—starved." Again futility. But the lack of plausibility is what really spoils the story.

In "The Lesson" Miss Stephens, a music mistress, is forced (by the exigencies of her work) to go on giving a lesson while her heart is breaking because of a note from her fiancé that he no longer loves her. Which is the same basic idea of one of Katherine Mansfield's stories: The charwoman, who was so busy earning her daily bread she could find neither time nor place to cry over the death of the child she loved.

Miss Joyce and her friend, Miss Hallett, are going to a party in "The Schoolmistress." They have lived together twenty years, yet Miss Hallett just learns from Miss Joyce that she has taught thirty years in the school, while Mr. Unwin, in whose honor the party is being given, has only been headmaster there twenty-five years. To commemorate their friendship Miss Joyce gives Miss Hallett her tortoise shell comb studded with a single diamond before they go off to the party. Afterward, Miss Joyce can think of nothing else except that the comb is no longer hers. When Miss Hallett comes up to her and says that Mr. Unwin wants to know how many years she has been at the school, she answers: "I don't remember. * * * Tell him I don't remember. I don't want any honor." Then Miss Joyce, feeling she has lost everything: "the most precious link with her girlhood," feels "she must cry."

Most of these stories are of individuals beaten by themselves, or what they think about themselves. Unlike Chekhov's stories they lack that relentless combining of circumstances which make for power against a nature not strong enough to fight. And unlike Katherine Mansfield's stories there is no play of light and shade to delight the reader, no happy choice of subject matter. And no tightening of his throat muscles as he reads. These are moods, done quietly in one color. As stories, they will add nothing to the reputation of the author, and many of them, such as "Nina," would better have been left as character sketches in the author's notebook to await the time when they would fit like bits of mosaic into a large pattern.