

H. E. BATES: *Dear Life*. Michael Joseph. 7s. 6d.

Mr. Bates has come to make something of a speciality of the short novel. It is an art that requires, above all, clarity of conception and elucidation. Mr. Bates has always been the master of a particular kind of cool, light and precisely suggestive prose, and in at least one of his short novels, or long short-stories, *The Cruise of the Breadwinner*, he was able to make his various gifts of narrative, observation and clear writing coincide admirably.

*Dear Life*, his new essay in this genre, is not nearly so successful. For once he seems to be writing out of character, from a kind of compulsion to project the squalid life of adolescent delinquency and ruthless violence that has become a familiar part of the contemporary scene. The characters in *Dear Life* are a young girl and a deserter who, after a casual encounter, are joined together in a senseless trail of robbery, murder, escape and death. There is a convincing air of reality, stunted emotions and unreasoned brutality about Mr. Bates's story, and the atmosphere of the small provincial town where it begins is well done. But somehow it all seems rather wearily obligatory and inconclusive. There is neither quite enough depth in the character-drawing nor a sufficiently heightened tension in the narrative itself to compensate for the hackneyed, cinematic echoes of the plot.