

The When of It

"Summer in Salandar," by H. E. Bates (*Atlantic—Little, Brown, 240 pp. \$3.50*), is a collection of short stories about male-female relationships written by a seasoned British author.

By William Peden

H. E. BATES, a thoroughly seasoned British literary campaigner, has steadily published fiction which makes the work of many of his contemporaries seem either slightly amateurish or pretentious. He has always been preoccupied with man-woman relationships and the usually disastrous outcomes, and this present collection of short stories entitled "Summer in Salandar," whose settings range from a sun-baked semi-tropical island to the country side within commuting distance of London, contains no exceptions. The center around traditional, almost cliché situations: the shipping clerk of the title story is irresistibly drawn to the disturbing young woman who turns up in Salandar during the summer season; a fortyish, nearsighted lover of horses becomes infatuated with a teenager who insolently rides a pony across his well-kept lawn; a truck driver is drawn into an affair with the repressed wife of an old and sickly husband.

Out of such situations and incidents of such characters, Mr. Bates expertly weaves the fabric of his fiction. Although his men and women are separated by age or coincidence or atavistic fears, uncertainties or inertilities, the reader is constantly aware that the gambit must and will be made, and will not be refused. The heart of his stories, as well as the chief source of their admirably building-up of suspense, is never will they? but when will they? what will be the consequences of the working-out of these campaigns of approach, withdrawal, and actual engagement, Mr. Bates uses cheap gimmicks. Artistry, intelligence and understanding are, like Othello, talked with Desdemona, the weapons he employs.

Mr. Bates's men and women are to be essentially unromantic, who threaten to erupt into violence at one stage of a long love-dance. The remarkable thing about these people never degenerate into caricature. None of them are sters, although they are threatened by monstrous forces which creep beneath the banal surface of their lives. They are potentially

people whose lives are about to take a disastrous turn. Disaster, indeed, seems to be their destiny; if they by chance escape it, frustration and loneliness are their rewards.

James Stern once aptly stated that H. E. Bates can write "for the fiftieth time of a field in summer as though he had never seen a field before." In a period which is producing more than its share of slovenly writing, Bates's prose is something to be cherished, as clear and fresh as the October air of "Death of a Huntsman," perhaps the best story in this good collection. Most important, he is a writer who has something to say, says it extraordinarily effectively, and at the same time communicates to lay and specialized reader alike.

On the Lam

"The Big Boxcar," by Alfred Maund (*Houghton Mifflin, 178 pp.*) is a first novel by a young English instructor in an Alabama college about a group of travelers, most of them Negroes, who are brought together in a railroad boxcar by their common determination to flee to the North.

By David Dempsey

ALFRED MAUND, the author of these seven loosely connected stories about some people on the lam, teaches English at a college in Alabama, but no one will accuse him of being a fancy writer. "The Big Boxcar" is an earthy, gutbucket performance which was inspired (so the author says) by Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." And yet, despite the fact that six men and a woman are brought together in a boxcar traveling north—there is no hint here of conventional Mr. Maund melds his theme and his characters so skilfully that the book virtually wrote itself. "The Big Boxcar" is by all odds the best first novel I have read this year.

These are tales of woe. Each of the seven travelers (six are Negroes, one is white) is fleeing the law, chiefly because of some infraction of the white man's code. There is, for example, Good-Rocking Papa, who has a white doctor after the doctor has crossed the color line to destroy his beautiful sister. "The Spook" is a story that is at once fantastic in manner and brutally ironic. Under the influence of a lunchtime "reefer," a spook grew three heads (or so the author tells us) and made the mis-

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