

THE FOUR BEAUTIES. H. E. Bates. *Michael Joseph*, 25s. 1968. 20.5 cm.  
192 pages.

Mr. Bates's latest volume presents four tales which are as diverse in content as they are unequal in quality: their resemblance lies in the author's fondness for exploiting the qualities of a landscape to set the tone of a story. 'The Simple Life' is the most impressive of the quartet. It is a study of a middle-aged wife who is driven to the point of breakdown by her husband's enthusiasm for a country cottage in the heart of the East Anglian marshes, where her short-lived love affair with a local odd-job boy brings temporary relief and ultimate disaster. This tale can stand comparison with Mr. Bates's best work. The remaining three, a sentimental, a melodramatic and a jocular piece, seldom rise above the level of competent magazine fiction.