

sidepaths to streams, varied and continuous, of dull and lifeless pedestrians, were dense with animal effluvia, gaping for a well-trimmed window of well-to-do greengrocers to deposit its carbonic propensities on some of their pots of bloom."

#### Drama :

"Madam-de-Maine followed him, to do the 'needful.' 'May I take off your boots, Lord Gifford?' she asked, in a tone of mocking innocence."

"No, by heavens, never! Begone, madam! I blame you, and you only, for all this! Leave me alone. For God's sake, do!"

As he raised his flashing eyes to hers, she saw a deep, forced passion brewing in their blazing glare."

#### And again :

"Whoever the party is who prepared his food, that is the guilty party!"

She flung a look of horror at Delina, whose face was bathed in flame; bit her lip, stamped her foot, and was assisted out of the room by two law officers, who appeared on the scene, followed by Doctor Kenny."

#### Psychology :

"Delina was unable to cast from her the weight of apprehension that dragged so heavily on her young heart. She had not yet been taught at the school of female art that sorrow was its sole foundation and hiding it in pleasant smiles. She sat sensitive to the fact that all eyes were upon her. Three hundred pair or so of such excited orbs flashing their gifted light on and over her, could hardly fail to provoke her gentle nature, draw her inward feelings to a nervous tenor, dancing in their cells of seclusion until their unstrung notes issued forth in the form of deep-drawn sighs. This picture of charming loveliness, as she sat, the image of simplicity, had by her undisputed wealth of enviable beauty drawn noiselessly upon her the silent comments of the lettered tools of graded lore that riveted the benches designed for opposing talent, behind which she tremulously rested."

But enough. No such story, it is safe to say, has appeared for years.

L. A. G. STRONG.

## Short Stories

**Cut and Come Again.** By H. E. Bates. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

**Fierce and Gentle.** By H. A. Manhood. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

**To Blush Unseen.** By Valentine Dobrée. (Cresset Press. 3s. 6d.)

**New Joy in Heaven.** By Sylvia Townsend Warner. (Cresset Press. 3s. 6d.)

**The Beginning.** By Mervyn Lagden. (Cresset Press. 3s. 6d.)

**And Lastly the Fireworks.** By John Pudney. (Boriswood. 7s. 6d.)

**The Laburnum Tree.** By James Laver. (Cresset Press. 3s. 6d.)

MR. MANHOOD in an interesting appendix to *Fierce and Gentle* tries to explain for the benefit of those who "think me neither vulgar, brutal, sentimental nor ridiculously romantic" how short stories begin. "It simply happens that a word, an incident heard or seen by chance, seems to illustrate perfectly some tiny bit of one's philosophy, to underline and explain, at least to one's own temporary satisfaction, some moment of experience very happily," and he prints, to illustrate his theme, some observations from his notebook. For example :

"Tramp with sling outside cathedral, trying to kill a pigeon to eat. Taking him to bishop, who happens to be eating pigeon pie (Remember Canon W.). 'Ah, my son, they died by act of God.'"

I am one of those who find Mr. Manhood both sentimental and romantic, and to me there seems a significant contrast between his amusing pointed "notes" and his finished stories. The short story is not merely an anecdote; it should add to the original observation something more important than a few thousand decorative words. But in Mr. Manhood's hands it is the original anecdote which is the more vigorous and vivid. Mr. Manhood has a trying habit of comparing something concrete with something abstract ("a bat entered in chase of a moth, disturbing as a seed of nightmare,") he is an idealist who resolutely improves on nature ("day-break with its star-washed, reviving wind which *never* failed"—the italics are mine—"to move the larks to an inspired frenzy of song,") and too often he adopts a breezy fanciful Coppard manner with its false poetry, its country simplicity which reminds one of earnestly gay Morris dancers circling in shoes and decorated braces.

"Sweet and Lovely. And so she was, a merry, slender beauty with frank blue eyes, a clear, glowing skin, lips full and rich and lively, and true sun-smoke hair. She walked lightly, jauntily, as with a sure knowledge of the best summer to come, happy as a bird at dawn and with a whistle as melodious. In those days she whistled a lot, tiny scraps of tunes, now tricky and sprightly, now soft and dreamy, that were like fine satins tried on for a moment and discarded for a lovely, languid nakedness."

It is not that Mr. Manhood is insensitive; far from it; it is hardness he lacks, the hardness which would prevent his

flinching away from the germinal anecdote into sweetness and fancy or sometimes into a kind of false Sandow violence. One story, *Framework for a Miracle*, a horrifying study of child imagination conditioned by slum streets and the fumes and stench of a dump playground, shows how satisfyingly he can sometimes write.

There was a time when Mr. Bates might have gone the same road, when there was a lushness in his touch, when he played with wild flowers like a mad maid in an Elizabethan play. *Cut and Come Again* is as completely free as its predecessor, *The Woman Who Had Imagination*, from this cloying sweetness. It has the hardness and assurance of emotional and technical maturity. The word "greatness" has been cheapened by the Sunday Press and yellow jacket advertising, in any case it is too vague a word to use in reference to these splendidly objective stories, but if one set Mr. Bates's best tales (and they can all be found in these last two volumes) against the best of Tchekov's, I do not believe it would be possible with any conviction to argue that the Russian was a finer artist. He was an artist only of greater range. Mr. Bates, of course, has learnt from Tchekov, but he has adapted what he has learnt to his personal, his English experience. One has the same sensation in his work as in Tchekov's of a mind lying open like a fine recording instrument, and life blowing through it. There is a story here of a roadside petrol station and all-night snack bar kept by a woman, of a young driver's mate and his half awareness in the summer night of a passion and tenderness he cannot give a name to. There is an anecdote, like one of Mr. Manhood's notes, at the centre of the tale, but it is not a neat tidied invention, it is something which carries its load of emotion (the character's, not the author's) on and out of the story.

"Then the lorry began to make speed and the smell of corn and plums and the summer land began to be driven out by the smells of the cab, the petrol and oil and the heat of the engine running. But suddenly he turned and looked back.

'The light's out,' he said.

Spike put his head out of the cab and glanced back. The sign was still flashing but the shack itself was in darkness.

'She's sitting in the dark,' he said. 'She always does. She says it saves her eyes and the light and she likes it better.'

The boy took a plum from his pocket and bit it slowly, licking the sweet juice from his lips as it ran down. He was still trembling.

And glancing back again he could see nothing of the station but the red sign flashing everlastingly out and on, scarlet to darkness, *The Station* to nothing at all."

Mr. Bates is supreme among English short story writers; and the work of most authors besides his appears shoddy, trivial or emotional. Only Mrs. Dobrée among this group can stand comparison with him, and she has written a short novel rather than a short story. But this tale of Lily, a plain half-witted domestic in a small country house, has the same delightful hardness as Mr. Bates's, a "guarded" quality which seems all the more valuable after the out-spoken emotionalism of Mr. Manhood. The vividness of Mrs. Dobrée's writing comes not only from a sharp pictorial eye but from a kind of transmitted happiness, the happiness of a writer who feels the whole character and setting come alive in her hands, a drive and confidence.

Triviality, after all, is less a failure in subject matter than a failure in the author's re-creating mind, a tiredness, the need to fake an aliveness the author doesn't feel. Few people can fake more skilfully than Miss Warner, but fake her amusing and ingenious stories are. Miss Lagden's country tales are sometimes rather art-and-crafty, like the coloured rhyme sheets of Georgian poets, but if the opening stories of *The Beginning* are her latest, she is a writer of individuality and of greater promise, I think, than Mr. Pudney, a rather precious sentimentalist, who has taken more than one step already along the Beverley road. But both these writers, whatever their faults, are trying to use words with care and freshness. They haven't the nightmare inefficiency of Mr. Laver. It is difficult to see how *The Laburnum Tree* came to be published. Mr. Laver's plots are of the popular magazine order, but his style belongs to a yet lower underworld, of which the pitchy darkness is only occasionally lighted by passages of really exquisite banality. "At that moment," Mr. Laver writes of the cuckolded husband in Malaya who on receiving his wife's note has leapt from under his mosquito net *kreese* in hand, "he could have broken his way through a stone wall; but there was no need to do that; the door of his room was open."

GRAHAM GREENE.