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"**M**ODERN English Short Stories" (Second Series) is really the key to these volumes, not merely because it contains good stories by good writers but because it so well illustrates the short story's revolution in this country in the past three or four decades. Its predecessor of 1914, "Selected Short Stories," which one exceedingly young aspirant in the art was almost vainly searching for inspiration in 1922, contained thirty stories. Of these more than one third were by American writers; Dickens, Scott, Lamb, Trollope, Meredith, Disraeli and Stevenson were the main props of the English team; only two women, Mrs. Gaskell and Mary Coleridge, were represented; and only Gissing and Hubert Cranke-thorpe (is this interesting writer, who died at twenty-seven, quite forgotten?) seemed to be doing exercises in something near the idiom as we know it today.

The present volume, to which Mr. Derek Hudson, the selector, contributes a very able introduction, contains twenty-one stories. None, of course, is by an American; almost one third are by women—Elizabeth Bowen, Clemence Dane, Rosamond Lehmann, A. L. Barker, Frances Towers and Virginia Woolf all admirably helping to prove Mr. Hudson's point that "it is one of the pleasures of the short story that it gives opportunities to writers of refinement who will never be among the 'big guns' of literature." Maugham, who incidentally did not begin to write short stories until some six or seven years after the appearance of "Selected English Stories," is the doyen among the men, who inevitably include Pritchett, Greene, Plomer, Linklater and John Moore from the pioneer corps of the twenties and

# SHORT STORIES

*MODERN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES (Second Series). Selected by Derek Hudson. (Oxford. 6s.)*

*WINTER'S TALES (No. 2). (Macmillan. 16s.)*

*TCHILLA AND OTHER ISRAELI TALES. (Abelard-Schuman. 18s.)*

By **H. E. BATES**

thirties, and Sansom, Urquhart and Nigel Kneale from a slightly younger brigade.

Over almost all these stories the aura of poetry is very strong. So, as Mr. Hudson points out, is the sense of humour. Pritchett's mordant little sketch about a bomb incident, "The Voice," is far more telling and more moving because he has dared to be funny rather than plain searing about it: a remark that also applies, though in lesser degree perhaps, to Graham Greene's "The Basement Room," the original of "Fallen Idol." Christopher Sykes, Nigel Kneale, William Plomer and Evelyn Waugh all keep their material similarly leavened, thus saving themselves from that sombre sogginess that it took the English short story, ponderously dragging so far behind nineteenth-century America, so long to shed.

"Why are you festooned in spinach?" asks one of the characters in "Entirely Platonic," Mary Clive's story in "Winter's Tales," and the remark provides another example of the power of the sudden, oblique, cut-in shot of humour to keep the arteries of a story pulsing. It is evident again in "Some Demon's Mistress," John Bayley's amusing but near-tragic story of a husband's fearful experience of the emotional treadmill after discovering his wife's secret diary, and yet again in Maurice Kennedy's "Vladivostok," prickly and salty as its symbolic sea-

thistle, the total balance spoilt only by the story's having been put into a straitjacket of Malory quotations, which I earnestly beg Mr. Kennedy to remove. William Plomer and Rosamond Lehmann again represented here, are backed by a number of younger writers of promise, John Bayley and John Wain particularly bright among them. I urge the publishers not to get cold feet about this winter enterprise of theirs. It is already good enough to become excellent and they may even care to remember, if they are bold enough, that some of us read stories in summer, too.

To transfer oneself from this fresh contemporary arena to "Tchilla and Other Israeli Tales" is to step into a sort of grandmotherly twilight where unhurried, voices tell stories largely by a process of reflection. Almost the entire atmosphere of the book is, as one of its editors remarks, that of "a family chronicle warmness similar to that of a grandmother telling the tales of her clan." Of the nine stories I like best Yitzhak Shenhar's story of a Jerusalem boarding-house, "David's Bower," a trenchant and amusing picture album belonging far less to the grandmotherly twilight of legends than the rest. Shenhar is a former Ukrainian railway clerk who has, I should guess, learned something at the feet of Gogo and of whom, very properly Gogol would not have been at all ashamed.