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# H. A. MANHOOD'S STORIES

Reviews by H. E. BATES

**A**LTHOUGH in the long list of contemporary English and American short-story writers there is no one like Mr. **H. A. Manhood**, he sometimes reminds me of a combination of A. E. Coppard and O. Henry. All three love the extravagant phrase, the odd situation, the odd ending, the odd angle. All three, compared with apparently straightforward writers like Maugham, Hemingway, Maupassant, and so on, may be called odd writers. They wade into the muck and colour of life up to their necks, without any literary kind of reticence. In particular Mr. Manhood, whose new volume is **Sunday Bugles** (Cape, 7s. 6d.), is devoid of all literary finickiness. He is the kind of writer who comes in with muck on his boots. He appears to be a fellow who slings words on to the page with the muscular enjoyment of a man laying on stuff with a trowel. His stories, like Mr. Coppard's, move with considerable gusto. It is worth noting, however, that in reality both Mr. Coppard and Mr. Manhood find difficulty in getting words on to the page; their strikingly plumaged metaphors are not birds which flash madly out of the subconscious; they are painted in with steady and sometimes painful care. This does not detract,

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## NEW NOVELS TO READ—

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and in fact perhaps adds, to the reader's enjoyment, and in Mr. Manhood's case it is one of the reasons for his high position among real imaginative writers to-day. When he writes a sentence like "Dumbarrow chimes came melodiously, like singing bubbles, across the weald," there can be no doubt of his calibre. He is almost too rich a writer, as the thirty stories in *Sunday Bugles* prove, for an age which exalts aridity. He is a cornucopia to an era growing too accustomed to drinking out of paper cups. To all who care for robust, full-coloured, originally flavoured writing, *Sunday Bugles* must therefore be warmly recommended.

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**Short Stories of To-day** (Humphrey Milford: Oxford, 3s. 6d.), a volume designed primarily for schools, is hopelessly mis-named and, to my mind, hopelessly planned. Its title should have been *Short Stories of Yesterday*. Of its thirteen writers four are dead, one was born in 1864, another in 1866, another in 1874; of the rest only Mr. Frank O'Connor and Mr. Richard Hughes were born in the present century. You may well ask where are Mr. Manhood, Miss Boyle, Mrs. Whitaker, Mr. Coppard, Miss Pauline Smith, Mr. James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Miss Elizabeth Bowen, Mr. O'Flaherty, and Mr. O'Faolain? No volume pretending to call itself *Short Stories of To-day* has very much point without these writers. Even a schoolboy, presented with this volume as something representative of the short story in his time, might well ask what was meant by it. The same schoolboy might well ask what Lord Peter Wimsey is doing here, together with the much-overrated "Saki," and as brittle a piece of imitation French by Mr. Leonard Merrick as was ever turned out. Without questioning the artistry of Wells, Maugham, Galsworthy, Walpole, Mrs. Mitchison, and the rest, I must say that the point of this volume completely defeats me.

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There is not much point either in **Mr. Peter Traill's** stories in *Six of One* (Barker, 7s. 6d.). The title might just as well have been *Half a Dozen of the Other*. We have surely met these stories, or their types, over and over again; the same mixtures of well-tried cliché ("dawned upon him suddenly"; "ventured the opinion"; "from his six feet of blond, athletic height"), well-planned surprise, club-humour, sentimentality. Mr. Traill is described as "a master of his craft," to which one permissible answer would be "what craft?"

## THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

**The Ancient World**, by Mr. J. M. Todd (Hodder and Stoughton, 9s. 6d.), is a highly creditable performance of a nearly impossible feat. It tells the story of civilization, African, Asiatic and European, from the beginnings to the fifth century A.D. In such a book proportion is everything, and if the author has the tact to find the right proportions, it would be foolish to dispute with him on any point of detail. Mr. Todd has given them all their right places, or something near it; Egyptians and Assyrians and Hittites, all of them, to say nothing of Jews, Greeks, and Romans. His book springs from lectures given to schoolboys at Stowe, where his ordinary work, strange to say, is that of teaching mathematics. He has thus the enthusiasm and the freshness of the amateur. He conveys an impression of taking a holiday among things he loves. The result, with its excellent illustrations, should have a success as a present for school-children with a taste for history and perhaps also as a school prize.