

world in New York it would be dismissed at once as merely a third-rate novel. It is as gross a falsification of the whole truth about publishing as "The Front Page" was of the whole truth about journalism, and to boot it has nothing of the brilliance of presentation of that uproariously funny play.

## Stories without Plot

SEVEN TALES and ALEXANDER. By H. E. BATES. New York: Viking Press. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

"ALEXANDER," which gives half its title to this volume, is a long short-story; the other seven tales are very short; they might almost be called sketches, if that did not imply a shallowness which would do them an injustice. They are stories without plot, vessels made to hold each a moment of emotion and all its overtones. Mr. Bates's method is much like that of Katherine Mansfield: he takes a single incident and so records its implications that it stirs the reader with vague feelings for which there is no name, not quite pity, not quite admiration, not quite recognition, not quite surprise, and yet partaking of all of these. Most of these stories are written from the point of view of a child, and all of them recapture to a remarkable



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degree the child's directness of view and child's indiscriminating interest in everything, regardless of what other people have decided to be interesting. Those stories written purely from inside a child's mind, such as "Alexander" and "The Barber,"

it may not be popular; but the best of the stories have a quality that will greatly commend them to the thoughtful reader: they never indulge themselves in analysis, but they set him at once to analyzing their effect.

## Mr. Hamsun at His Best

VAGABONDS. By KNUT HAMSDUN. New York: Coward-McCann. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHILLIPS D. CARLETON

THIS novel is a strange shift of Mr. Hamsun from the sad, sardonic tales that he has given us in these later years—of the disintegration of an old fixed society, of the survival of the unhappy individualist. He is no longer interested in the movement of a lone figure against a hostile background, and in the strange turns and agonies of this figure; the background has suddenly come alive and absorbed his attention. This volume is a return to the motif of the "Growth of the Soil"; the author's interest lies in those people living close to the soil, who, in his eyes, alone live a full life in the slow rhythm of poverty. In them the nature mysticism of the early Nagel has found expression, in a deeper and broader form.

"Vagabonds" is the tragedy of the wanderer, the man uprooted by accident from his natural setting, restless and unsatisfied, moving in an aura of splendor in his youth, that fades, to a graceless middle age. Edevart, bred in a small northern village, injured to the hardships of the Lofoten fishing, chief support of his family, is swept out into the world by August, the sailor and hobo. Easy money and hard necessity corrupt his innocence and power for work. The opportune appearance of August sweeps him away time and again from his half-hearted attempts to strike root in one locality or another. His family in the little fishing village, through the slow succession of years, grows up strong in the bonds of local custom. Outside the barriers of this culture, despite their eager and protective affection, and unable to feel at home in any other, Edevart drifts, probably in that great current that was setting towards America and its vaguely realized opportunities.

Mr. Hamsun is reiterating in kindlier mood what has been the theme of other novels, that a man is strong only by virtue of a well knit society, that such a society is pitifully helpless before the inroads of industrialism, which serves only to corrupt and corrode old and kindly bonds. He has completed in this book a study of national character that began in "Growth of the Soil," of those strangely assorted elements in the Norwegian: an extreme practicality and an extraordinary power of fantasy and invention. Isaac could represent the first, and August, the second. And incidentally here is another interpretation of the great west moving wave of migration that



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degree the child's directness of view and child's indiscriminating interest in everything, regardless of what other people have decided to be interesting. Those stories written purely from inside a child's mind, such as "Alexander" and "The Barber," carry an emotional atmosphere that is only to be expressed by contradictions, a sense of the wonder of everything, which because it is omnipresent the child feels without being aware of it, as one is hardly conscious that one is enjoying fresh air if one has forgotten the feel of indoors. "Alexander" also reveals the confident curiosity of the child who has never been hurt and so is not afraid of anything, an illusory boldness which one does not know whether to destroy or protect, but which touches one with a peculiar poignance.

The stories written from a grown person's viewpoint are less strikingly successful. It says much for Mr. Bates that he has been able to take stock of pathetic situations, the death of a gypsy's old mare for instance, and bring to them his own freshness of touch, but still they are less moving than the others. The semi-allegorical fantasies, "The Peach-Tree" and "The King Who Lived on Air," are still less successful. In them the author has tried to introduce symbolism and even satire into his fairyland, but the fairyland vanishes at once; it is like putting a burden upon a soap-bubble.

There is however one story, "The Child," in which Mr. Bates has succeeded brilliantly in combining his two worlds. In it a child looks through a window of lemon-colored glass at a bathing beach until, seized by a sudden impulse, she slips off her clothes and runs down naked to join the fat, scandalized bathers. There the falsely golden world seen through the window-glass, the world of ugliness in bathing suits invaded by the direct, naked child, are clear enough symbols, and like all good symbols express much more than can be expressed in any other way, and yet they do not disturb the simplicity of the atmosphere.

This collection is uneven, and it is to be feared that

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