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IRISH SHORT STORIES

Reviews by H. E. BATES

IN *Midsummer Night Madness*, as I am never tired of pointing out, Mr. Sean O'Faolain gave us one of the best volumes of stories that have come out of post-War Ireland. Combining the methods of George Moore and Turgenev, he had perfected a style of rich subtleties, strong atmospheric mood, and deep emotional-romantic appeal. The danger lay in an obvious temptation, becoming a tendency, to sentimentalize Ireland, especially the Ireland of decay and "old, forgotten, far-off things." In *A Purse of Coppers* (Cape, 7s. 6d.) this temptation would appear to have been too strong for Mr. O'Faolain to resist, and one has an impression of a fine talent dissipating itself in small things. Unfortunately for Mr. O'Faolain, as for all of us, the best subjects cannot go on being used over and over again, and one of Mr. O'Faolain's best subjects was Ireland in revolution. It inspires no stories in the present volume, and religion seems to have replaced it. Religion is here, indeed, often more than a small obsession, though it inspires two of the best stories in "The Confessional" and "Mother Matilda's Book." For the rest, there are only occasional glimpses, in these small-town stories of small-town characters seen through the eye of nostalgia, of Mr. O'Faolain's incomparable talent.

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It ought not to be necessary, nowadays, to point to the achievements of Mr. Liam



Mr. Liam O'Flaherty.

O'Flaherty. He is well known as a novelist and the author of *The Informer*, but has given all the best of his poetical, explosive talent to the short story. In *The Short Stories of Liam O'Flaherty* (Cape, 7s. 6d.), fifty-three of his finest tales are now collected. They reveal a genius for stark description, tenderness, and sympathetic insight into the lives of Irish peasantry and fisher-folk that give many of the tales themselves the finality of folk-lore. Influenced by Maupassant, Mr. O'Flaherty took the Irish peasantry, and no less the Irish clergy, and laid bare its pettiness, lust, greed, superstition, humour, and courage. Influenced by nobody, I think, but himself, he wrote stories of animals and birds that have no equal in the language. As prime example of both methods, look at "Poor Folk," "Spring Sowing," and "The Reaping Race"; and at "The Cow's Death," "His First Flight," and "The Wild Goat's Kid." They are slight evidence of the work of a master.

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The Faber Book of Modern Stories, edited
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