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MR. GREENWOOD'S STORIES OF MEAN STREETS

Reviews by H. E. BATES

AS a novelist Mr. Walter Greenwood did well to take Arnold Bennett as a model; as a writer of short stories he could hardly have made a worse mistake. Where the exclamatory, heavily-worded and verbose Bennett manner, itself derived from Dickens, fitted *Love on the Dole* very well, it hangs on the stories in *The Cleft Stick* (Selwyn and Blount, 10s. 6d.) like an overcoat several sizes too large for its wearer. The scene of these stories is the same as that of the now deservedly famous novel, the back-streets of Manchester and Salford, and many of the characters are the same. These stories are, in fact, the foundation on which the novel was made — "Miss Ethel Mannin, a complete stranger to me at that time, was good enough



Mr. Walter Greenwood.

to read the collection and to advise me to write a novel, using the same characters. . . . *Love on the Dole* was the consequence." The advice was sound; Mr. Greenwood lacks many of the attributes of a good short-story writer: ability to compress, to let both emotion and moral be implicit, to let irony prick home its own point. He is still under the impression, apparently, that a good style is made up of long words and that the farthest way round, in writing, is the nearest. His experience of the Manchester scene is bitterly personal, yet he persists, often, in dressing it up out of all proportion, and it is significant that the best thing in the book is not a story at all, but his essay, *The Old School*, an account of his schooldays at a Salford council school. Mr. Arthur Wragg contributes some prim illustrations to the book. They are perfectly apt to the text, having the same black-and-white crudity, the same punched-home irony, the same sincerely-felt bitterness. But this does not change my belief that a short story should illustrate itself, or that Mr. Greenwood is still primarily a novelist, and a very good novelist at that.

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Like the man quoted by Miss Edith Wharton in her preface to *Ghosts* (Appleton-Century Co., 7s. 6d.), I do not believe in ghosts, but I am afraid of them. Fortunately, I have never seen a ghost except on the stage, and what I am really afraid of is the thought of them. It is significant, I think, that stage ghosts always have a way of looking a bit silly. Humour kills ghosts in the same way that knowledge destroys superstition, and the ghost-writer always presupposes a lay-degree of credulity in the reader. For this reason I am afraid I am a poor victim for Miss Wharton's castle ghosts, lonely French fishing-village ghosts, and the rest. Miss Wharton herself says that the success of a ghost story depends on its thermometrical quality: if it sends a shiver down the spine it has done its worst. But well managed though they are, these stories kept me as warm as toast.

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Japanese Tales of All Ages, by Omori Harris (Hokuseido Press, 7s. 6d.), is an anthology of Japanese stories, mainly historical, drawn from various centuries. I am struck most by their naïvety and by the way opportunities are taken to glorify the country's national heroes. Lacking the pure form of folk-lore, these stories strike me as being more suited to the child than the grown-up.