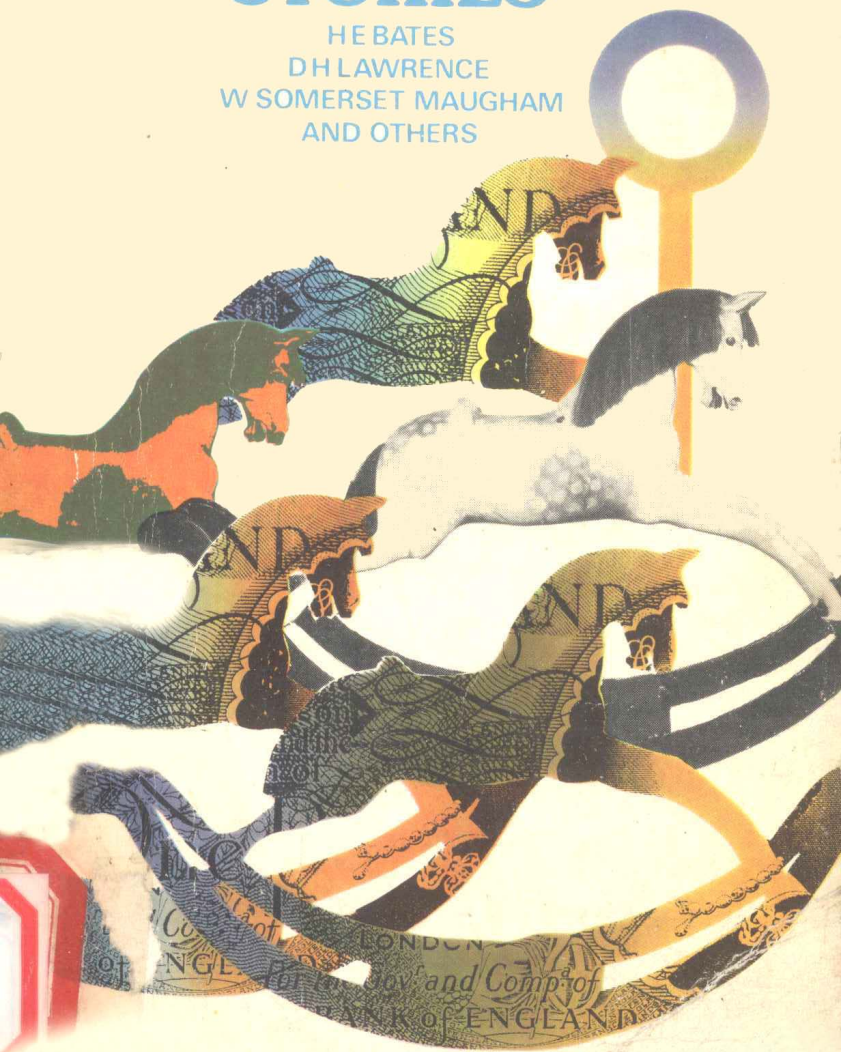


BRITISH AND AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

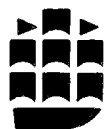
HE BATES
DH LAWRENCE
W SOMERSET MAUGHAM
AND OTHERS



BRITISH AND AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

SELECTED AND SIMPLIFIED BY
G. C. THORNLEY, M.A., Ph.D.

ILLUSTRATED BY LEONARD ROSOMAN



LONGMAN

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¹The 2,000 root words of the *General Service List of English Words* of the *Perin Report on Vocabulary Selection*.

INTRODUCTION

HERBERT ERNEST BATES (born 1905) is a novelist, essayist and short-story writer. Of his novels *The Jacaranda Tree* (1949) is set in war-time Burma, and *The Scarlet Sword* in India. His short stories about English country life are well known. His works are popular outside Britain, and have been translated into fifteen foreign languages. *Silas the Good* is a humorous story about a grave-digger.

JAMES THURBER (1894-1961) was a humorist who was born in Ohio. In his stories strange people, who are the products of fate, pass through strange disturbances. In *The Catbird Seat* a woman is introduced into an office and causes violent changes. Her unpopular activities are stopped at last by means of a trick.

WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM (born 1874) has written numbers of short stories in addition to his novels and plays. Many of his stories are set in the East. *Mabel* is about a girl who is determined to marry her man, and chases him in various eastern countries.

WILLIAM SAROYAN (born 1908) is an author from California. He likes all sorts of people, and the characters in his stories range from Armenian-American workers like himself to business men. He likes to start a story without much introduction. *The Barber's Uncle* tells a sad story which a boy heard when he went to have his hair cut.

DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE (1885-1930) wrote several remarkable novels, some books of poems, and short stories. His essay, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) is an example of a different type of work. *The Rocking-Horse Winner* is a short story about a boy who could find out the winner of a future race by riding his rocking-horse. He made a lot of money, but died.

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O. HENRY was the pen name of William Sydney Porter (1862-1914). As a young man he went to Texas, where he worked in the General Land Office and in a bank. His stories show his inventive mind and his humour, and he is considered one of the cleverest of short-story writers. *Springtime* is a love story in which the girl is found, after some difficulties, through a mistake in her typing.

HECTOR HUGH MUNRO (1870-1916) was at first a newspaper man in Russia and in Paris. His first collection of short stories, *Reginald*, was published under the pen-name, Saki, in 1904. Other collections followed. *The Open Window*, about a girl who can invent a story without much preparation, is one of his best-known and shortest stories.

MARK TWAIN was the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), who was born in Missouri and became a pilot on the Mississippi River. Later he worked for a newspaper, and also gave lectures. *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) is one of his best-known books. His humour is well exemplified in *The Income-Tax Man*, a short story in which the writer and lecturer boasts about his large income before he discovers that the man who is listening is the tax-collector.

FRANCIS MARION CRAWFORD (1854-1909) was born in Italy and educated in the United States and abroad. He travelled a good deal, and his forty novels are placed in the countries where he lived. About stories he said that they must be written to give entertainment. Several of his short stories, of which *The Upper Berth* is one, are based on the supernatural.

STEPHEN LEACOCK (born 1869) is a Canadian author, and worked as Head of Department at McGill University, Montreal. He wrote on Canadian history and on the lives of Dickens and Clemens; but he is best known for his humorous works. *My Bank Account* is taken from his *Literary Lapses* (1910) and describes how he opened and closed his account at a bank.

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SILAS THE GOOD

H. E. BATES

IN a life of ninety-five years, my Uncle Silas found time to try most things, and there was a time when he became a grave-digger.

The churchyard at Solbrook stands a long way outside the village on a little hill of bare land above the river valley.

And there, badly dressed, my Uncle Silas used to dig perhaps a grave a month.

He used to work all day there at the blue-brown clay without seeing anyone, with no one for company except birds picking the worms out of the thrown-up earth. Wickedly ugly, small and misshapen, he looked like a stone figure that had dropped off the roof of the little church, something like a little man who had lived too long and might go on living and digging the graves of others for ever.

He was digging a grave there once on the south side of the churchyard on a sweet, hot day in May, the grass already long and deep, with golden flowers rising everywhere among the gravestones.

By noon he was fairly well down with the grave, and had fixed his board to the sides. The spring had been very dry and cold, but now, in the shelter of the grave, in the strong sun, it seemed like the middle of summer. It was so good that Silas sat in the bottom of the grave and had his dinner, eating his bread and meat, and washing it down with the cold tea he

always carried in a beer-bottle. After eating, he began to feel sleepy, and at last he went to sleep there at the bottom of the grave, with his wet, ugly mouth falling open and the beer-bottle in one hand and resting on his knee.

He had been asleep for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes when he woke up and saw someone standing at the top of the grave, looking down at him. It was a woman; or so it seemed.

He was too shocked and surprised to say anything, and the woman stood looking down at him, very angry at something, making holes in the grass with a large umbrella. She was very pale and thin, with an ugly face. She seemed to have very big boots on, and from under her thick, black dress Silas saw a great brown leg, about the size of an airship.

He had not time to take another look before she attacked him. She waved her umbrella and shouted, blaming him for idleness and lack of respect.

She moved her head from side to side and stamped one of her feet. At last she demanded, her thin neck stretching downwards to him, why he was drinking beer down there on holy ground, in a place that should be sacred to the dead.

Now at the best of times it was difficult for my Uncle Silas, with ripe, red lips, red eyes and nose, not to look like a drunken sailor. But there was only one thing that he drank when he was working, and that was cold tea. It was true that it was always cold tea with whisky in it, but the basis remained, chiefly, cold tea.

Silas let the woman talk for almost five minutes, and then he raised his hat and said, "Good afternoon, madam. Aren't the flowers nice?"

"Not content with behaving like that on holy ground," she said, "you're drunk, too!"



"Someone was standing at the top of the grave"

"No, madam," he said. "I wish I was."

"Beer!" she said. "Couldn't you leave the beer alone here, of all places?"

Silas held up the beer-bottle. "Madam," he said, "what's in here wouldn't harm a fly. It wouldn't harm you."

"It is responsible for the ruin of thousands of homes all over England!" she said.

"Cold tea," Silas said.

She gave a cry of anger and stamped her foot. "Cold tea!"

"Yes, madam, cold tea." Silas unscrewed the bottle and held it up to her. "Try it, madam. Try it if you don't believe me."

"Thank you. Not out of that bottle."

"All right. I've got a cup," Silas said. He looked in his dinner basket and found a metal cup. He filled it with tea and held it up to her. "Try it, madam. Try it. It won't hurt you."

"Well!" she said, and she reached down for the cup. She took it and touched it with her thin lips. "Well, it's certainly some sort of tea."

"Just ordinary tea, madam," Silas said. "Made this morning. You're not drinking it. Take a good drink."

She took a real drink then, washing it round her mouth.

"Refreshing, isn't it?" Silas said.

"Yes," she said, "it's very refreshing."

"Drink it up," he said. "Have a little more. suppose you've walked a long way?"

"Yes," she said, "I'm afraid I have. All the way from Bedford. Rather farther than I thought. I'm not so young as I used to be."

"Oh," Silas said. "Young? You look twenty." He took his coat and spread it on the new earth above the grave. "Sit down and rest yourself. Sit down and look at the flowers."

She surprised him by sitting down. She took another drink