

Among the neatly-tailored English lot, Nicholas Monsarrat has an anecdote about a strike-threat on a liner docked at Liverpool, holding the two sides of the dispute even in a pretty pointless display of novelist's cunning. Anthony Cronin's low-powered satire on the Irish, the BBC and his own sweating and twitching hero pulls the usual amount of sad fun out of the theme of the intellectual in doggy, serious pursuit of money and girls. H. E. Bates's stories in *The Fabulous Mrs V* are more fanciful, though they mostly stick to people in their back-gardens on summer afternoons. His calculated vagueness, the way he has of idly looking at the clouds to mark a significant moment or a wild surmise, is a trick that often seems to me to turn out wrong. These are so like parodies of sensitive stories: at the end, for instance, of one garden-party - and end of story - a lady is left contemplating a smoked sprat that has fallen on the lawn.