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Welis's mother-mistress comforters and great-understanders of the child that is in all men, is left disconsolate.

## ENGLISH OR AMERICAN ?

Reviews by H. E. BATES

**M**R. V. S. PRITCHETT'S *You Make Your Own Life* (Chatto and Windus, 7s. 6d.) is his first volume of stories for seven years. This puts most of the work in it, I should say, before his novel, *Dead Man Leading*, a fine book which somehow failed to stagger the critical functionaries as it should have done last year. In judging the stories, I continually have the novel in mind. A writer can develop a lot in seven years, and Mr. Pritchett's development as shown in *Dead Man Leading* was immense. The stories show a quieter process of evolution. They are unequal. The prize clearly goes to *Sense of Humour*—which, incidentally, reveals that Mr. Pritchett has that quality himself—a story in which the same remarkable terseness of style as in *Dead Man Leading* is used to exhilarating effect. Here, as in other stories, Mr. Pritchett's appeal is subtle, his style criss-crossed with wiry ironies. His work is a cunning mesh of oblique wit, half-statements, sharp ends of satire, bright conceits and sensibility. Its only real fault is that it is sometimes too cunning. The reader gets into its coils and, on getting out again, wonders vaguely what it was all about. Mr. Pritchett is a bit afraid of the obvious. He is inclined to distrust any simplicity that is not double-edged. His appeal is from and to the head, generally speaking, rather than from and to the heart. In fact, I would put my money on him as an intellectual humorist rather than anything else. His next volume will show. I hope, however, it won't be so long in coming. I admire Mr. Pritchett, and seven years is too long a time for stocktaking.

The stories in *Quest*, by Mr. Richard Findlay (Murray, 7s. 6d.), recall a question which never ceases to bother me. Why do writers who are tough, phlegmatic, super-sensible, coldly English, etc., in life become as soppy as wet sponge cake when they express themselves in fiction? Mr. Findlay is a good example. Flying-officer, with adventures in Africa, Spain, and other hard-bitten parts, with a fondness for he-man recreations like hunting, racing, and shooting, he becomes a purveyor of real heroic wish-wash on paper. His stories are almost all of flying and adventure, of supposedly tough service heroes ("His shoulders shook in the extremity of his grief," etc.) in far countries. Now and then you have a feeling that he has rumbled it all, that you are going to get the truth soberly and unsentimentally, but tradition is too much for him. His characters have been moulded in the right schools, the right clubs, and the right politics before ever he touched them. They are heroes pulled by the wires of a tradition much too strong for him.

Mr. Stephen Vincent Benét is a much-respected American poet with no small reputation as a short-story writer. Even so, his *Thirteen o'Clock* (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.) disappoints me. At the same time it encourages me. The current popular opinion is that English writers of short stories bear to American writers of short stories much the same relationship as the heavyweight boxers of the two countries. My feeling is that there are a dozen English writers of stories, among them Mr. Pritchett, Mr. Coppard, Mr. O'Faolain, Mrs. Whitaker, Mr. Halward, who could wipe the floor with Mr. Benét. I am inherently suspicious of writers who, like Mr. Benét, claim to combine prophecy, history, fantasy, and philosophy, and sure enough

Mr. Benét strikes me as being rather a woolly romantic. Romantics are bad enough, but American romantics can give points to all others. There is a feeling of highly-toned self-consciousness about some of these stories that lets down the "hard-boiled tradition of the American story with a sad bump."

Miss Dorothy Canfield's collection, *Fables for Parents* (Cape, 7s. 6d.), has been selected from a large output of some years. The stories all deal with some aspect of parenthood (or grandparenthood) and are remarkable for their conflicting qualities: shrewdness and obtuseness, satire and sentimentalism, wit and wooliness. The stamp of the magazines is on most of them. The time was when Miss Canfield was noted for an incisive mode of story-telling, for quick, sure, notable examples of the art. The time appears to be past.

## INDIA, DORSET, AUSTRIA

Reviews by SEAN O'FAOLAIN

It is a rare and happy week in which the public is offered three books of so much interest; let alone merit, as these three following. They are definitely books for the "Reading Public"—if the reading public is sensible enough to desire no more than a natural balance of sensitive writing, efficient narrative, and characters that distract the mind from personal things and absorb it in themselves. Here are three books which will enlarge experience and soften the heart.

The most ambitious is Mr. Louis Bromfield's novel about modern India, *The Rains Came* (Cassell, 8s. 6d.). He is an American, but I should



Mr. Louis Bromfield.

be surprised to find that he is wholly Anglo-Saxon-Nordic. His immense design is so arabesqued; his attitude is so cosmopolitan; his sense of colour is so barbaric; there is so much savage thrust in his writing: and on the other hand, there is such a tendency to let restraint go, to fall into sentimentality, at times even to be satisfied with a quick veneer, that I feel the mark, on all counts, either of race or travel. For his framework—and one of the things I regret about this fine piece of work is that he has adopted a framework of rather conventional situation, and *deus ex machina* climax—he chooses an Indian state in monsoon time; while, as for time, not more than a week or two pass between the first and last of these odd six hundred pages.

His central figure, in so far as there is one, is Ransome, an American remittance-man, a roué, a waster, a sensualist, something of a cad, but made human and pitiful because he has been battered into sickness of mind by the terrible experiences of the Great War; but he is, let it be also noted, a V.C., a man of great human sympathy, *au fond* a "white man." Over against him is the "slut," Lady Heston, who visits Ranchipur with her crude, wealthy, shopkeeper-millionaire husband. There are also the Smileys, fine American missionary folk; the Simons, less fine of the same profession; with their daughter Fern, who sighs for a life more worthy of the name than her snobbish mid-Western mother can offer her either in dead-dull Ranchipur or in "respectable" Poona; there are a dozen others, all reflecting the lurid light, and the sapless baking heat of the plains, showing it in their pulsing nerves, their dried