

UNSATISFACTORY SITUATIONS

H. E. BATES: *Colonel Julian, And Other Stories*. Michael Joseph. 10s. 6d.
 LOUIS AUCHINCLOSS: *The Injustice Collectors*. Gollancz. 10s. 6d.

Mr. H. E. Bates is a writer with a well-deserved reputation for a sense of words and a gift for expressing the more vague and aimless digressions of the human heart. His present collection, so far as scene is concerned, covers most of the ground that at one time or another he has already traversed—obscure upland farms, decaying country houses, Indian hill-stations, battle-fields of Burma, Swiss hotels: these provide some of the familiar backgrounds. There is always the same slow, serious, perplexed consideration of matters that are scarcely ever going right. Mr. Bates's world is a rather sad one that stretches from honest, inarticulate, illiterate agriculturists unable to deal with their emotions (or the paper-work now inseparable from farming), to elderly, optimistic retired cavalrymen whose false teeth their wives deliberately shatter against bedroom walls.

It would be idle to pretend that, with its many merits, Mr. Bates's art is not at times a trifle depressing; but a graver critical objection is to be aimed at a certain woodenness of texture in treatment of personalities. Here, for example, is a description of Colonel Julian, chief character in the story that gives the book its title. The Colonel is 83, and R.A.F. pilots are billeted in his home at the period of the Battle of Britain:

That also was a thing he could not get used to. In his day you went off to war after a series of stern farewells; you lived a life of monastic remoteness somewhere on a damnable plain in India, or you went to the northern hills and were cut off for some months at a time. . . . You looked like a soldier. But nowadays these young fellows flew out and put the fear of God into what they called a gaggle of wolvers or a bunch of tanks at four-thirty in the afternoon, and at seven they were lying in the bay with a young woman or drinking gin in the local bar. For some reason or other they hadn't any kind of soldierly look about them, either. He had looked in vain for the martial type. He sometimes saw instead a touch of almost feminine dreaminess about some of them. They were very quiet sometimes and had long-seeing eyes. They were boyishly hilarious and laughed fantastically behind

quite impossibly unclipped mousaches. There was none of that heroic stuff at all. There is perhaps more than a hint of stylization in this picture; and surely the writers of the Colonel's own youth—ranging from Kipling to Ouida—had remarked in no uncertain terms at least very similar characteristics in their treatment of warlike types.

Mr. Louis Auchincloss also deals with unsatisfactory situations, but handles his material in a very different manner; though the note he supplies to explain the title of the stories is possibly not without interest in connexion with Mr. Bates's book, too.

I came across the term "injustice collectors" in *The Battle of Conscience*, by Dr. Edmund Bergler. It is a term which he uses to describe neurotics who continually and unconsciously construct situations in which they are disappointed or mistreated. This broad definition is followed by a more detailed description of the psychological process involved, in which he points out, among other things, that these persons are seeking unconscious masochistic pleasure.

The stories that follow—somewhat in the manner of Edith Wharton—increase the evidence that a widespread reaction is taking place in American literature from the violence and eclecticism of the last two or three decades, and that the latest school of American writers looks back to a more solid and sensitive tradition. Mr. Auchincloss's sardonic and unmerciful stories should certainly be read:

Daddy, large and hearty, was always spoken of as one of the best lawyers downtown, and was certainly a rich man, too, despite his eternal jangle about being the average father of an average American family. Mummy, stout and handsome, busied with good works, and the morning man was always filled with invitations to accept the chairmanship of worthy drives. Brother Fred was captain of his school football team; brother Sam was head of his class; Grandpapa was the good judge whom all had revered, and beautiful Granny one of the "last" of the great ladies—there was no end to it.

The stories analyse the difficulties and unsmoothness of human relations, both in and out of the home. Some are set in London during the war. Mr. Auchincloss is an author to watch.