Reviews of *East End My Cradle* by WILLY GOLDMAN, *Books and You* by SOMERSET MAUGHAM, and *Ten Victorian Poets* by F. L. LUCAS

BOOKS & LIFE

BY H. E. BATES

IT is too often forgotten that the Jewish pogroms of Nazi Germany are a long way from being the first of their kind; the bitter memory of similar persecutions in Tsarist Russia lies behind the struggle of many a Jewish family driven westward. Such a family, I take it, was that of Mr. Willy Goldman, who has put down the record of his own struggles in *East End My Cradle* (Faber, 8s. 6d. net). It is commonly held that persecution, adversity, humiliation, racial scourges, and struggles of all kinds simply have on Jewry the effect of making it a still stronger unity, and this book is in many senses a justification of that theory. The scene of Mr. Goldman's life is Whitechapel; his father is a market man selling fish, and with "every Jewish trait except the one the Gentile world has made into a legend—acquisitiveness"; the house is, or was, a six-roomed one, but "rather like a tall box-room partitioned off into six sections. Privacy had only a technical existence . . . and the house was not yet in that stage of dilapidation that induces bugs to make it their permanent home. They came in the hottest periods only. . . ." From this home, since there was nothing whatever to tie him to it, Mr. Goldman went out with the familiar accompaniments of the poor boy in any big city, New World or Old, Jew or Gentile: salmon-tin football in the streets, feuds between neighbourhoods, rough-houses, a passion for minor criminals, a diet of fish and chips, the familiar family brawls roused by drunkenness and sex-jealousy, the dope of cinemas, and finally that special prerogative of Jews, the tailoring sweat-shops. The picture drawn of these scenes of childhood is Hogarthian—with, I suspect, half the worst detail rubbed out; its peculiar ghastly hopelessness is contained in a comment which, in my experience, is unmatched for despondency. Mr. Goldman records that he hated the sun. "We saw no poetry in sunshine. . . . Personally I have no knowledge of those legendary happy faces of which the new sun is reputed to be the harbinger. I have no knowledge of them. . . ."

The picture of tailoring sweat-shops—Mr. Goldman began at sixpence a week and computed that he would reach a living wage when it was time to die—is recurrent throughout Jewish writing: always the same barbarian of a Jewish *émigré* who after thirty years cannot read the language of the adopted country, the long hours, the control from the top, the misery. What makes Mr. Goldman's picture remarkable is not only its vivid and living drawing, but the fact that humour, rather than bitterness, is its prevailing note. There is no political harangue about downtrodden workers, well though it would have been justified; the funny side of things takes its place, the eternal Jewish buoyancy keeps Mr.

Goldman up. Bitterness comes into a fine and moving chapter called "A Youthful Idyll," which with slight alterations might survive as a short story as poignant as anything of Gorky; in it Mr. Goldman puts down the story of first love in which the dying girl consumptive is a humourist too. There is another chapter, of which the central figure is one of those Jewish East-End boy pugilists who fight themselves to a standstill, or a sanatorium, at fifteen; this, too, is a story. The book is filled with such sketches of character, drawn with that peculiar fecundity and warmth that so often marks the Jewish writer and which makes me very hopeful indeed of Mr. Goldman's future either as commentator or novelist. Which line he will take is his own affair, but I shall be surprised if he does not emerge as a writer of significance, succeeding naturally, and deservedly, out of this first appalling period of adversity.

To turn from Mr. Goldman's smell of raw fish and sweat-shops to Mr. Maugham's brief survey of literature, *Books And You* (Heinemann, 3s. 6d. net), is like coming out of a pit into a clean, well-lighted place. In effect the difference is exactly what you would expect—the difference between literature and the comment on literature, between humanity and the biological treatise. Mr. Maugham's work, as first written, was done as a series of articles for *The Saturday Evening Post*, and in contrast to most commissioned work of its kind is written with admirable clarity, intelligence, and individual taste. It is a strange comment on the great tribe of *Saturday Evening Post* readers, and not on Mr. Maugham, that it should be necessary to state that "I suppose Balzac is the greatest novelist who ever lived." That it should be assumed that it never occurs to several million people to find out that fact for themselves is an odd reflection on editorship and the American mind. Mr. Maugham is supplying the goods ordered, and supplying them of top quality so far as they go: a shrewd, clear survey, hardly an analysis, of English, American, and European literature, a sort of guide to intelligent reading made valuable by Mr. Maugham's own opinions and prejudices. This little book, if it should appear in America, will show up in sharp contrast to ninety per cent of American comment on literature, which is either juggling or jargonese. It is Maugham's saving virtue that he has never been frightened of simplicity.

Maugham also has never been academic; he too wrote a book on London's East End, and would probably be the first to admit that Mr. Goldman's rank picture was nearer to literature than anything he himself has to say about it. Mr. F. L. Lucas, in *Ten Victorian Poets* (Cambridge, 7s. 6d. net), is as remote from Mr. Goldman as the Bodleian is from a fish-and-chip shop. He is concerned because the present age reads too little poetry: he hates cinemas; he thinks little better of the motor-car. Because the age is mechanized, his argument runs, it is consequently impervious to beauty; because "cup-ties, rock-climbing, film-melodramas, and detective stories" are popular there is a corresponding decline in the taste for Keats; because a man sees beauty in a carburetter he is a philistine. He speaks of the "transfiguring power of sudden sunlight on the dullest landscape." yet in Mr. Goldman there is a man who hates just that effect. What Mr. Lucas has to say of Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Coventry Patmore, Clough, D. G. and Christina Rossetti, William Morris, Swinburne, and Hardy is of great academic interest. He writes with grace and culture; yet I would urge him to read Mr. Goldman and then try to align his own view that "poetry and life are interlocked" with what he himself also calls the "sterile futility of most human struggling."

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