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NEW ENGLISH REVIEW

JULY 1946

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John Boyd-Carpenter	Douglas Jenrold
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Kenneth Hare	George Stitt

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THE NEW ENGLISH REVIEW

THE STATE OF THE PARTIES

TWO remarks at the Bournemouth Labour party conference struck an unpleasant note. The first was made by Mr. Bevin, in the course of an otherwise courageous and constructive speech; the second by Dr. Dalton. Mr. Bevin referred to the handicap under which he laboured in having "to clear up the mess of this world after twenty-five years of appeasement and six years of war". Dr. Dalton asked his followers to note that "for the next year or two taxation would not fall so fast as if they were Tories and had no social programme".

These remarks cannot be dismissed as partisan exaggerations flung off in the heat of debate or at an excited election meeting. They were both made in the course of long, carefully prepared speeches on an occasion specifically devoted to formulating and bringing up to date Labour's case and recommending it in detail to the rank and file of the party. The arguments addressed to the party conference by these Ministers are the arguments which will be used up and down the country for the next three years, and they were manifestly put forward with that intention. Both the statements we have quoted contained explicit and unequivocal errors of fact. Both statements are of a nature calculated to deceive, by reason of the authority, high position, and great ability of the speakers, all those millions in the electorate who by reason of their age are ignorant of the political history of the period from 1914 to 1929, and very many of whom are equally ignorant, by reason of their age, of all political history prior to the last election. How is it possible to doubt that these statements, so manifestly calculated to deceive, were intended to deceive?

MR. BEVIN'S statement, unless he regards himself as having been one of the leading members in a government devoted to appeasement, takes appeasement back to 1914, to the beginning of a war against German imperialism, supported by the whole Conservative party, opposed by almost all the Labour party, in which Mr. Herbert Morrison figured as a conscientious objector, while Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, later the first Labour Prime Minister, was engaged in trying to negotiate a compromise peace, not covers the Versailles Treaty, against the harshness of which the

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question of successful industrialisation in the United States links up with some important statements in *Russia in Perspective*, by George Soloveyehik (Macdonald, 5s.), in which the author draws attention to the remarkable rate of industrialisation in Russia in the years immediately before 1914, which was faster even than that of America at the same period.

* * * *

Those interested in country life and in what might be called the philosophy of living in the country should read *Ditchampton Farm*, by A. G. Street (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 12s. 6d.); and *Cottage Tale*, by Esther Meynell (Chapman and Hall, 12s. 6d.). For those who prefer a more exotic form of existence, *From a South Sea Diary* may be recommended, by Sir Harry Luke (Nicholson and Watson, 12s. 6d.), which gives an excellent idea of what the day is like for the Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific.

* * * *

Lastly, there are two books about the theatre—*Theatre Royal, Drury Lane*, by W. J. MacQueen Pope (W. H. Allen, 17s. 6d.), and *Stars who made the Halls: A Hundred Years of English Humour, Harmony, and Hilarity*, by S. Theodore Felsead (Werner Laurie, 21s.). There are some excellent stories in both these books of strange personalities who should not be forgotten.

HERSITES.

LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Edited by HUGH KINGSMILL

LITERARY NOTES

THE VOYAGE AND OTHER POEMS

Hugh Kingsmill

Kathleen Raine

THE CITY OF GOD

John Stewart Collis

THE DIPLOMATIC HISTORY, 1713-1933

Patrick Bury

THE GARDEN. TALKING BRONCO

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THE NEW TESTAMENT NEWLY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

Bernard Blackstone

A MAP OF VERONA. THE ISLES OF SCILLY AND OTHER POEMS

W. H. Mellers

THE LIFE OF HENRY LABOUCHERE

Anthony Powell

THE STORY OF BURMA

C. Conway Plumble

NOVELS

Ruby Millar

PICTURES

Michael Meyer

LITERARY NOTES

P. G. WODEHOUSE

It is more than forty years since I first read P. G. Wodehouse in *The Captain*, a boys' magazine. In those days his humour was not the all-pervasive element it has since become. The hero of those early stories was a serious young cricketer called Mike; and though in making his central figure an athlete Wodehouse no doubt bore in mind the tastes of his audience, who would not have cared to read about a prodigy of learning, I think that Mike really embodied the qualities he valued most—physical strength and fitness, simplicity of mind, and innocence of spirit. His germinating humour he embodied in a youth called Psmith, who at a pinch could knock up runs or knock down a villain as briskly as Mike, but who even when least detached in act still remained detached in feeling, a remote and invulnerable spectator of the human scene.

Unlike Psmith, Mike was vulnerable, and one of the later stories in which he appears shows him cut off from cricket by the necessity to earn a living as a bank clerk, a situation which no doubt reflected Wodehouse's occasional dependency in the first years after leaving school. But success came quickly to Wodehouse, and as his difficulties vanished the Mike element in his writing dwindled and the Psmith expanded. So far as his work was concerned, this change was very much to the good, for his Mike stories suggest that his genius would have been depressed, not enriched, by prolonged anxiety and strain, and that he needed the ringside, not the arena, to bring his gifts to full fruition.

our minds slide along too easily; here we are arrested and the teaching assails with a new impact. "Jesus also said to his disciples, If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self. . . ." That is sharper and realer to us than "let him deny himself"; we are made to think what the words really mean. And that, in itself, is an inestimable service to Christianity. St. Paul's epistles in particular are gainers from Father Knox's careful and lucid prose; the voice of the man is heard more often, the shouting of the theologian less; and many an obscure passage takes on clarity. Here is the opening of the second chapter of Ephesians for example: "He found you dead men; such were your transgressions, such were the sinful ways you lived in. That was when you followed the fashion of this world, when you owned a prince whose domain is in the lower air, that spirit whose influence is still at work among the unbelievers. We too, all of us, were once of their company; our life was bounded by natural appetites, and we did what corrupt nature or our own calculation would have us do. . . ." It will be sufficient to sell that rendering side by side with the Authorised Version or even the Revised Version to understand the magnitude of Mgr. Knox's achievement.

BERNARD BLACKSTONE

SOME RECENT POETRY

A MAP OF VERONA. *Poems by Henry Reed. Constable. 3s. 6d.*

THE ISLES OF SCILLY AND OTHER POEMS. *By Geoffrey Grigson. Routledge. 5s.*

We all know that tradition is a good thing and that the absence of traditions—both of poetical idiom and of civilised values—is the central problem for the poet today. At the same time we are apt to blame contemporary poets for being "derivative", and we can, I suppose, justify this apparent contradiction only through particular judgments of sensibility. If we say that a modern poet is derivative we mean precisely that the conventions he derives from someone else are not sanctioned by social values and traditional beliefs; and clearly in an age in which values and beliefs are not clearly defined it is going to be more than usually difficult for the technical discoveries of a genuinely new and integral sensibility to be assimilated by other poets unless their own authentic spiritual evolution happens broadly to coincide with his.

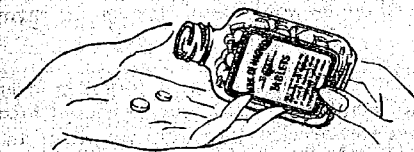
Now, while I do not think that W. H. Auden has ever succeeded in defining his own criterion of values maturely, at least he at one time had a fresh vision of the contemporary world which he communicated through appropriate rhythms and metaphors. These metaphors and rhythms, if they have not been absorbed by many less talented men, have become one part of the stock "poetic diction" of our time, and Mr. Grigson is one of the many verse-writers who exploit them. He is clearly an intelligent man who observes keenly, and in the conveyance of unrelated moments of experience he uses Mr. Auden's methods with considerable acumen (see, for instance, "O in the Hollow Station"). Where he fails is in the ability to organise these fragments of experience into a pattern which is both personal (because he made it) and impersonal (because the fragments are objectified in the making of the pattern, in the perception of the relations between them). His work is impersonal in another sense, in that it might have been written by anyone with a sufficiently agile mind and with the appropriate kind of cultivation. This is a volume of modern poetry; we are mentally and emotionally livelier for reading it, but I doubt if we are any the wiser.

Mr. Reed's poetry "derives" from an influence which is even more ubiquitous in modern verse than that of Auden. The fact that Mr. Eliot is so much greater a poet than Auden doesn't necessarily mean that he is a better model; but it is

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significant that Mr. Reed's volume includes one of the funniest parodies I have ever read, and that such parodistic brilliance could have been achieved, in this "Chard Witlow", only by someone to whom Eliot's later poetry had meant much. It points to a self-awareness which is confirmed as soon as one looks closely into the "serious" poems.

One sees, then, that, though Mr. Reed's peculiarly subdued, restrained movement has obviously been moulded under the influence of late Eliot—one catches the echo in such lines as

"I woke to that mystery
Which we can all wake to, at some dark time or another,
Waking to find the room not as I thought it was,
But the window further away, and the door in another direction"

—yet the movement has become indubitably a personal attitude, the result not perhaps of an "influence" but of a natural consanguinity of mind. If one compares the reverberation attained on the word "deep" through the rhyme and enjambement of this passage—

"... Who year after year shall creep, forgotten lover and bride,
To your door and knock, and knock, at every Christmastide,
Who lost and ever-rejected, turn from your door and weep,
And retrace our steps to the harbour, where it lies silent and deep
In a slumber of snow and starlight"

with Grigson's

"and the two who walk by,
On the grass, and the train slows
Down."

one sees the difference between a functional use of rhythm that comes "from within" and one that is, cleverly enough, applied. And in all Reed's successful poems we can observe that the precise evocation of a nervous experience is introduced not, as in Grigson, for its own sake, but in order that it may be related to other experiences and acquire a significance that we can crudely call allegorical.

"The Return" is one of the finest examples; but "The Wall" uses a witty, almost playful tone in its octosyllabic couplets which can reconcile levity with a theme profoundly solemn—and "universally" valid. Similarly, "Hiding in the Furze" uses the characteristically flat rhythms and reiterations to induce a condition of hysteria, but turns out to be much more than a piece of nervous transcription; and even the puns and monotonous rhythms in the ostensibly ironic poems about army life are revealed as part of an attempt to achieve the integration of apparently irreconcilable experiences (cf. the changing significance of the phrase "the ever-important question of human balance").

It is this search for formalisation, whether in slight or more difficult work, that I find impressive in Reed's poetry. It is true that so far there is a certain limitation of emotional range about his characteristic movement, that the short poems are the more successful, and that the longer free-verse monologues evoke a comparison with Mr. Eliot's mature economy in this manner which no contemporary verse could live up to (even such sober and dignified verse as the vision of the dancers in "The Place and the Person" appears almost garrulous in so far as it suggests a relation to the "Dantesque" passage in "Little Gidding"). But Mr. Reed is none the less a poet and not a verse-maker; one awaits his next volume with lively anticipation.

W. H. MELLERS.

A FORGOTTEN VICTORIAN?

LABBY: THE LIFE OF HENRY LABOUCHERE. By Hesketh Pearson. Hamish Hamilton.

This entertaining biography was first published in 1936, and Mr. Hesketh Pearson tells his story in such a lively manner and is so delighted by his hero that he is ungrateful to disagree with his conclusions; but, with all vestige of freedom lifted out in a considerable part of Europe, with restrictive legislation growing apace in this country, with a crushing weight of taxation, and problems of foreign policy unsurpassed in our history, we can look back a little wearily at the antics of Henry Labouchere and feel that some people never know when they are well off.

In certain directions he was a man of remarkable gifts. He conducted his own newspaper with great ability (though no match for Cecil Rhodes), no one was shrewder at party intrigue, personally he was popular, and his reputation as a *farceur* was of great use to Gladstone when he wanted a go-between or a stalking-horse. This too has an interesting story (told on Labouchere's authority) that the G.O.M. was prepared to bribe Crawford with an English judgeship not to cite Dilke as corespondent and bring scandal on the Liberals. Often an embarrassment to his own party, it is well-nigh impossible to descry in Labouchere at this distance of time any trace of constructive political thought. Colossally rich, he was a "radical" who disapproved of Socialism, who opposed female suffrage, who advocated Home Rule while admitting that he considered Ireland merely "a pawn in the game", who laughed at "that mirage, the European equilibrium"; and who, though never tired of inveighing against "the English gentleman", was always prepared to assume the guise of that fabulous monster when it suited his turn.

No doubt he drew attention in *Truth* to a fine collection of scoundrels (to frequent brothels in youth and expose them in age is the way of all flesh), but under his ownership the paper was astute rather than edifying. In spite of his attacks on royalty and blusterings about a republic, he was accepted as an acquaintance by King Edward VII (then Prince of Wales), and the hard-boiled, high-playing, not over-sensitive circle that is associated with the name of Marlborough House was a milieu in which he might have made himself perfectly at home.

His disregard for such things as titles and decorations is brought out by Mr. Pearson; but titles and decorations are, after all, no more than a vehicle for calling attention to their bearers—and a very inadequate form of exhibitionism compared to the variety with which an egotist of "Labby's" calibre was equipped. For example, most of us would be hard put to it to state positively the new Privy Counsellors appointed in the last Honours List; but if one of them had behaved at the investiture with the bad manners shown by Labouchere (although he had come specially from Italy to be sworn) he would at least be making a bid for a wider publicity than that inherent in the honour itself.

Labouchere's aim was power without responsibility. We see him at his best, perhaps, as a war correspondent during the siege of Paris in 1870; and, in spite of the irritation that he felt against the French, there can be no doubt that his own French blood played a great part in the formation of his character. His destructive energy can be well envisaged in the Chamber of Deputies. He was in person a greater argument than he himself could ever bring forward against an Eton education and great wealth, in many ways a burden on society and an arch-waster of the taxpayer's time; but he was not a nonentity, and he was eminent, even in the House of Commons, as a great buffoon.

ANTHONY POWELL.