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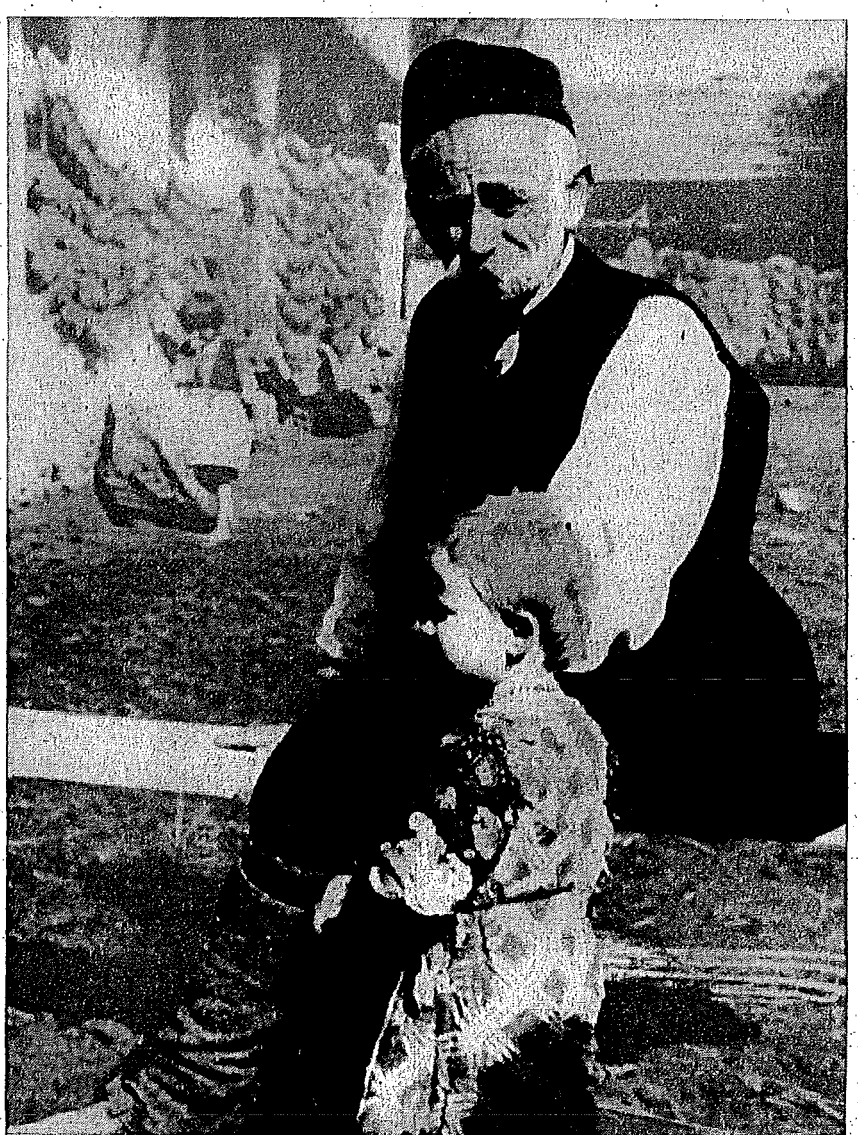

Two generations in Macedonia

A European Danger Spot

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The Meaning of the Nuremberg Trial

By LORD WRIGHT

IN the Middle Ages a terrible pestilence called the Black Death swept over Europe. Historians say that more than twenty-five million human beings perished—great areas were desolated. In the second world war it has been calculated that twenty-two million human beings perished, devastation on an immense scale was caused and incalculable misery was inflicted on humanity. The Black Death was a visitation of Providence; the war was caused and waged by the deliberate intention of human beings. The purpose of the Nuremberg trial was to establish who these were and to punish them for their evil deeds so far as they could be proved.

After the most thorough and exhaustive trial known to history, the Tribunal has condemned and sentenced certain of the men accused before it, acquitting three. The critics of the judgment appeal to what they say is a rule of law overriding the justice of the result—a super-justice. They say that there is no precedent for establishing the crimes and imposing the punishment.

The crimes and atrocities committed by the Axis powers are beyond anything in history in regard to both their range and their enormity. They are international in character and are to be judged according to rules of international law. I should think very ill of international law if it provided no means of punishing such crimes. The demand of the civilised nations for their trial and punishment was not the voice of hysterical passion like the cry 'hang the Kaiser' in 1919. It was motivated by the deep and universal sense of humanity that such actions should not escape their just punishment.

No one would, I imagine, deny that murder is a crime. Murder includes the deliberate killing of human beings without justification of law. The killings charged at Nuremberg were killings which the Tribunal has held could not be justified under International Law, that is the laws or customs of war. Let us take a few examples of crimes and murders done in the conduct of the war. The killing of hostages, the murder of prisoners of war, the extermination of Jews and others, the slaughter of millions in concentration camps and in occupied countries by manifold means, were all accomplished in flat breach of the Hague and Geneva Conventions. These are Conventions which had been solemnly agreed by all the assembled nations, including the Axis powers, for the humanisation as far as possible of the horrors of war. Are we to accept the old saying 'one murder makes a felon, millions of murders make a hero'?

The magnitude and atrociousness of the crimes are so obvious there is no need for precedents. Suppose that in a remote and civilised island, no one had committed murder: but one day some man came and murdered an inhabitant. Can it be thought that the man would go scot free because no one had anticipated such an evil deed and the penal code was silent? It is true that it would be against natural justice to punish a man for something which he could not know was a crime. But did any one of the accused really think that he was not committing a crime? Hitler actually told his generals that legality did not matter; success would wipe out every stain. When Keitel confirmed the order to destroy captured commandos, he rejected objections of his colleagues by replying that they were speaking the language of the old chivalrous war. The same inhumanity may be seen all through the horrible chain of millions of murders, burning of women and children in the village churches, the murder without trial of four captured English airwomen who, having been injected with some drug, were perhaps still alive when wheeled on the trolleys into the cremation furnace. So also of the whole catalogue of infamous atrocities, torturings and slave-labour. In the concentration camp at Auschwitz at least four million men and

Colonel Gayre began his work in the most chaotic conditions. The fighting had only recently passed beyond the regions where he was to function, and he set up his first office in a single room in bomb-damaged Palermo. He plunged straight into the job, however, and, though beset with difficulties at every turn in the early stages in obtaining the barest necessities such as office furniture, paper, typewriters, and civilian staff, he eventually succeeded in his ambition of setting Sicilian educational life on its feet again by Christmas. His task was twofold, for not only had he to supervise, in conjunction with the local educational authorities, the reopening of the Sicilian schools and universities—in many instances seriously damaged by bombing—and prepare 'defascistised' textbooks for them, but also he had to weed out fascist elements among the teachers and university professors. As, under the fascist regime, all members of the teaching profession had to hold a party ticket if they were to teach at all, the task of separating the convinced from the merely nominal fascists was anything but simple, and was further complicated by the flood of denunciations, often prompted by purely local and personal jealousies, which were constantly being brought before the Amgot personnel. However, hard work, a good staff, and a very genuine readiness to see the Italian point of view enabled Colonel Gayre to override most obstacles, and by Christmas the schools and the three Sicilian universities were reopened, and he was able to move on to his second headquarters in Naples.

As will be seen from this brief summary, the title of Colonel Gayre's book is somewhat misleading, its scope being confined purely to Sicily and Southern Italy, and to the problems of education facing Amgot there. The general reader will, however, find much to interest him in this story of the early stages of liberation and in Colonel Gayre's sympathetic picture of the Sicilian scene, in which, as an ethnologist in civilian life, he took much more than a passing interest. Lord Rennell's Foreword, which gives a brief account of the origins of Amgot, is a model of its kind.

New Novels

Thieves in the Night. By Arthur Koestler. Macmillan. 10s. 6d.
Back. By Henry Green. Hogarth Press. 8s. 6d.
Mist in the Tagus. By Tom Hopkinson. Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.

IN almost every way, Mr. Arthur Koestler's new novel is profoundly depressing. It depresses one on his behalf because he has suffered what he describes; on behalf of the Jews he writes about because a solution to their problems seems almost unimaginable; and on behalf of the readers who normally admire his work because *Thieves in the Night* is a poor book. Mr. Koestler seems indeed to be not very interested in making it any better, and I felt while reading it that the contempt he appears to feel for most groups of people had somehow invaded his attitude towards novel-writing, and — less pardonably — his attitude towards his readers.

Thieves in the Night could doubtless have been a worthy successor to *Darkness at Noon*; one could forgive it for being less objective, since Mr. Koestler has himself been more deeply involved in what he describes. It is a story about a group of Jewish immigrants to Palestine. They arrive on a night in 1937; the book tells about their building of a settlement; it carries us through their days of achievement, setback, and hardship, up to the time of the 1939 White Paper. It ends with another small batch of immigrants arriving in Palestine in the same year. Threaded through this chronicle of events is the personal story of Joseph, a half-Jew who has joined the Zionists; the girl he loves is murdered by Arabs, and this turns the scale for him so that he throws in his lot with the terrorists. I do not think we are to assume an identity between Joseph's views and Mr. Koestler's, though I see that this has been promptly taken for granted in some quarters. What he shows us is an example of how 'those to whom evil is done do evil in return'; and he convinces us that a sober and dignified effort towards a good life has become transformed by frustration and betrayal into lawless violence. The plight of the Jews is described thus:

> We are homesick for a Canaan which was never truly ours. . . . Defeated and bruised, we turn back towards the point in space from which the hunt started. It is the return from delirium to normality and its limitations. A country is the shadow which a nation throws, and for two thousand years we were a nation without a shadow.

Mr. Koestler has summed up the tragedy in that unforgettable last image; and it is obvious that his subject is a great one. It is here that one's cause for depression rises: rarely can such a subject have been so dully and so mechanically treated. We are given many illuminating facts; but during scarcely more than a dozen pages does the book come alive as an original story; there are page after page of discussion, of would-be satirical portraiture which I feel any novelist anxious to do a good job would have seen to be commonplace and flat. No readers enjoy more than do English readers satire about themselves abroad; but *A Passage to India*, to say nothing of other books, has set a standard in this sort of writing which one cannot ignore.

And, alas, Mr. Koestler tends more and more to become a publicist. He is perhaps not to be blamed. It is an easy line, and doubtless it is justifiable. I can imagine that tolling in his ears is the death-knell of civilisation. Art seems increasingly crowded on to a narrowing littoral and facing an incoming sea. I think a critic is called upon to understand and sympathise with this point of view; he is also called upon to say that straight polemical writing is more readable than the casual dramatisation found in *Thieves in the Night*. It seems idle to suggest that, with his gifts, Mr. Koestler could have developed his characters to a point where they become interesting, and cease to be merely a set of wooden objects asking the reader for pity. We know that if Mr. Koestler cared to try, he could force the pity from us. We know that he could also make us laugh, but here, as in his play 'Twilight Bar', he prefers facetiousness. The solemn importance of the subject prevents one from ignoring the book; but it is a great disappointment.

So many intelligent novelists in recent years have eschewed the use of plot and substituted what may be charitably called 'theme' that the sight of any sort of plot emerging from a novel goes to a reviewer's head. The position is much the same with wines. Years of tormenting abstinence deaden one's judgment. Plots and wines return, and at first it seems in both cases that any blessed thing will do. The excitement of wanting to know what will happen next leads one to murmur preliminary words of extravagant praise. Then the plot falters, the wine doesn't turn out as well as you expect, and your words of praise have to be withdrawn. Thus with Mr. Henry Green's new novel, *Back*. It starts an attractive story about a man named Charley Summers returning with a peg leg from a prison camp; Rose, his former mistress, the wife of a friend, has died. By a curious contrivance Charley is introduced to her illegitimate half-sister, Nancy; he cannot believe she is not Rose herself with her hair dyed. It is part of the nightmare quality of being 'back'. I do not object to an improbable plot. But Mr. Green's plot totters; it too is peg-legged and has to have a long rest in the middle. Its end is convincing and beautiful, but by the time it comes we have slightly lost interest.

If you know Mr. Green's other novels, its curt title will suggest to you at once that he has chosen a good 'theme' for himself; there is his customary poetry about the book, and there is the intensity of feeling found in *Caught* and *Loving*. The ideas that he implies in his titles are for him poetic ideas, as summer or winter might be to a poet. It is this that makes Mr. Green one of the most striking and original of modern novelists. To me he seems also one of the best. He does something new and good. I can see that his curious style may be an irritation to some readers; me it normally charms. Adaptations of highly mannered authors are always dangerous; but Mr. Green seems to find genuine kinship with the sad, wistful mood of the earlier Bloom chapters in *Ulysses*. His echoing poetic images, recurring and transformed like musical phrases, are to him a natural and not an artificial way of seeing and feeling; and they reproduce something real in our own sensitivity. His new novel contains many fine passages; its comedy is excellent. If it is less of a success than its two immediate predecessors, it is nevertheless something one will keep with Mr. Green's other books and take down from time to time.

Mr. Tom Hopkinson's second novel, *Mist in the Tagus*, has a fault staggeringly unusual in contemporary novels: it ought to have been longer. The people and emotions he deals with demand greater space for their proper emergence than he has allotted them, so that relationships which should have been dramatised are often merely described: there is a feeling that some of them have been unduly potted. It is a story of two heterosexual girls in love with two non-heterosexual young men. It occupies the week or fortnight of an English girl's holiday intrusion into a leisured small group of people who have drifted down from Europe into Portugal. The feeling of rapidly shortening time as the girls attempt to accomplish their desires is excellently achieved; so is the sense of inevitable failure which pervades their efforts. Everything in the book is well conceived and well ordered; the actual succession of events and disclosures shows a most intelligent and perceptive writer at work. But the final feeling one is left with is that one has seen it all through the wrong end of a telescope. Today this seems like being given an ounce of best butter in place of a pound of common marge. One hardly knows whether to be grateful or not; it is another aspect on the plot and wine situation referred to above.

HENRY REED