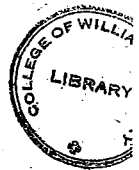


STATESMAN AND NATION



The Week-end Review

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CONTENTS

COMMENTS	Page 77	A WILD GOOSE CHASE	By R. S. R. Fitter	83	LT. COL. G. R. GAYRE v. THE NEW STATESMAN	Page 86
SOCIAL SECURITY	79	THE MOVIES	By William Whitebait	84	AND NATION	86
THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE	80	RADIO NOTES	By Edward Sackville West	84	BOOKS IN GENERAL	By V. S. Pritchett
LINES DESIGNED TO GIVE OFFENCE TO NONE	By Sagittarius	TWO SHOWS	By Roger Marvell	84	REVIEWS:	
A LONDON DIARY	By Critic	CORRESPONDENCE		84	The State and the Public	By Kingsley Martin
THIS ENGLAND		From Dr. Lindsey W. Batten; Hester Maylien; Douglas Goldring; H. H. Wingate; Maurice Cranston; Joan Preston.			Eyes and No Eyes	By Raymond Mortimer
A SOCIALIST EXPERIMENT	By Shiela Grant Duff				Coal Face	By William Garnett
THE FUTURE OF THE INDIAN ARMY	By Samuel T. Sheppard				New Novels	By Henry Reed
	82				WEEK-END COMPETITIONS	91

SOVEREIGNTY AND DIGNITY AT UNO

NOTHING can stop big Powers bullying and coercing their small neighbours if they wish to do so, and Persia, land of extreme poverty, gross corruption and strategically placed oilfields, is a natural centre of political intrigue and intervention. Historically Britain and Russia have much the same record in Persia. To-day the U.S.S.R. is in a stronger position and plays the tougher game. Following the time-dishonoured formula, Mr. Vyshinsky argued before the Security Council that for the Soviet Union to limit its sovereign rights to bargain as it liked with Iran would "not be in conformity with the dignity of any of the member nations of the Council." If that were so, UNO would be meaningless. In the end, the Russians did not stand pat by this formula. Direct negotiations are to proceed between Russia and Persia, but the Council retains the right to call for information on their progress and results.

Provided that Mr. Bevin and Mr. Vyshinsky want a settlement, their blunt speech and vigorous argument are all to the good. Presumably on the Greek dispute Mr. Bevin will not repeat the Soviet fault of trying to prevent discussion of the real issues. Mr. Bevin probably dislikes some parts of the British record in Greece; he should willingly admit mistakes and publicly explain his present policy. On the subject of Indonesia, Mr. van Mook's statement that the old colonial attitude of the Dutch is now ended, and that they are unanimous in wishing to give an independent status to Indonesia, sounds like an effort to save the face of the Dutch Bourbons who have opposed him throughout and who are now presumably, largely through British pressure, prepared to accept the Sjahrir Government. Britain has everything to gain by full discussion of both these "situations."

For the rest, UNO has agreed on Mr. Trygve Lie, Foreign Minister of Norway, as its Secretary-General. Mr. Trygve Lie is a popular person who comes from a country which everyone respects and no one fears. He owes his appointment perhaps less to his excellent qualities than to the fact that he does not divide the East from the West. Russia, America and Britain can all agree about him. The proposal to invite the World

Federation of Trade Unions to be special guests of the Assembly was defeated by an American counter-proposal that the A.F. of L. should occupy the same position. As a result, Britain and America voted for the inclusion of both and the Russians for their exclusion. Strangely enough, when it came to the obviously sensible proposal that the W.F.T.U. should be a consultative member of the Economic Council, Britain and America were among the out-voted delegations. The W.F.T.U. has a unique position in being the one body which represents the working-class of America, Russia and other Powers, and it is right that its voice should be heard on the Economic Council.

In a long and able speech in the House of Commons, Mr. Zilliacus proposed a change in the Constitution of UNO. His proposals were similar to those often made in this journal. He wishes the Assembly to represent political parties and not national States, and looks forward to the time when it will become a genuine Parliament of the World. He spoke with the detailed knowledge of an official who served the League of Nations from its outset, and his proposals are worth the most serious study. At the moment, it must be admitted, they are academic. None of the big Powers is prepared for the limitation on sovereignty involved, and Russia is the least willing to see any modifications of the Charter.

The Argentine Dictatorship

With the UNO stage occupied by the Anglo-Soviet duologue, little attention has been paid to other sources of international friction. Among these, the case of Argentina is outstanding. Although few reports on the situation there appear in the British Press, newspapers in the United States—notably the *New York Times* and the *Herald-Tribune*—have been publishing long articles from their correspondents in Buenos Aires which reveal the lengths to which the military-fascist regime has now gone. Some façade of democracy remains to impress foreign opinion, but the campaign of terror against the opponents of the dictatorship has continued

throughout the period of preparation for the "free" elections scheduled for the end of February. Colonel Peron, who has nominally resigned his official positions to run as a Presidential candidate, retains the strings of power and uses the swollen police force to arrest democratic leaders and journalists, to drive workers on to the streets to provide high attendances at his election demonstrations, and to break up opposition meetings with great brutality. This internal repression is paralleled by the warlike preparations of the regime: Paraguay and Bolivia are already under the influence of Argentine, which operates through the army officers. In Chile, there are fears of a military putsch of Argentine inspiration. In the last year, Argentine military expenditure has been four times that of 1941, and the published figures alone absorb half of the present budget. The construction of military roads in frontier provinces and the rapid expansion of the army are but part of a programme which aims at the militarisation of Argentina and the inculcation of Fascist ideologies, especially among the youth. Like Hitler, Peron has openly proclaimed his aims and his glorification of war; like Hitler too, he relies on the divisions among his opponents. His record reveals that on several occasions he has outsmarted both London and Washington, and he feels able to repeat those feats of deception. Latin-American opinion is uneasy at the prospect of a Fascist bloc in the south of the continent, but the small States are unwilling to act against Argentina without strong assurances of outside support. Many people in the United States are now realising the error made in smuggling Argentina into UNO at San Francisco. While Argentine delegates sit in Central Hall, American spokesmen like Henry Morgenthau, Walter Lippman and members of the State Department, openly expose the Fascist administration these delegates represent. As a memorandum circulated to UNO delegates by the *New York Nation* remarks, Argentina's rulers are to-day committing crimes for which the Nazi leaders are in the dock at Nuremberg—conspiracy against peace, and crimes against humanity.

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driven him into the most astonishing mis-statements. In 1910, he tells us:

Roger Fry became interested in the fortunes of the Grafton Galleries then drifting towards insolvency. Endeavouring to retrieve that situation, he determined to organise an exhibition there of French Paintings exemplifying the latest tendencies. On his way back from Paris with a truck-load of exhibits, he spoke with mingled amusement and apprehension to a friend whom he met on the train at Folkestone. He had, apparently, no exalted notions about the artistic merits of the projected show.

It would seem odd if Mr. Bodkin had never known Roger Fry. It would seem odder if, having known him, he could believe that Fry's admiration for the Post-Impressionists had been founded on a desire to rescue the Grafton Galleries from insolvency. Mr. Bodkin had only to read Virginia Woolf's Life of Fry in order to discover with what characteristic and almost frantic enthusiasm he regarded the exhibits he was launching on London. Not one penny of the profits made by the Post-Impressionist Exhibition went into his pocket. They were divided between Mr. Desmond MacCarthy (the secretary of the show) and the proprietors of the Grosvenor Galleries, in which Fry had no financial interest whatsoever. Those who calumniate the dead expose themselves to no legal penalty, but is it not rather credulous of Mr. Bodkin to accept lightheartedly stories that are both so improbable and so easily disproved?

Mr. Bodkin's book was originally written to help the public to enjoy pictures, and the strangest thing about the new section is that it is meant to make the reader not "approach" contemporary pictures but recoil from them. Knowing that his tastes in contemporary painting were different from mine, and finding a section entitled "The Approach to Modernity," I expected him to lead me up to his favourites in the same persuasive way in which he had led me up to old pictures. Perhaps if somebody well educated and highly articulate like Mr. Bodkin would explain to me the esoteric qualities to be looked for in the works of Sir Alfred Munnings, Mr. Burra or Dame Laura Knight, I might become able to enjoy some subtle nuances I have hitherto missed. But if Mr. Bodkin likes the work of these painters, he does not say so. Indeed, his book does not contain one word of praise for any picture by a living man. Does he then think that no contemporary painting is worth approaching? If indeed this is his belief, I wish he had admitted

it and enlarged upon his reasons. Such a point of view would be interesting to hear discussed, if only for its singularity. On the other hand, should there be painters alive who excite his enthusiasm, his silence is unkind both to them and to us.

RAYMOND MORTIMER

COAL-FACE

Miners' Day. By B. L. COOMBES. Penguin Special. 1s.

Perhaps not many of those who are partial to practical facts view clearly or with much concern the activities of miners. Dust is traditionally associated with nothing but dust; filth and misery with misery and filth. What is there interesting about pit-work, anyway? "Coal," says B. L. Coombes in this splendid book, "is a hard mineral, and there are things that go with its winning which are as black and as hard as the coal." Yet although his subject is so ghostly and interminable in experience, Bert Coombes does not deform, castrate, nor exaggerate it when he makes of it so absorbing a study.

It is a description of the people and the conditions which beset them in life, work, and in death at Resolven, Glamorganshire. At times the mountain is alive with creaking of roof, and crashing fall crushing asunder stout posts like splitting firewood; then the dripping of small stones heralding more falls. Meet poor Dan, sinking beneath his chestful of dust; Benji, the sparrow-like rubbish man, inaccurate as he is keen on all he hears and reads. Then the begrudging overmen, the compensation quibblers; the Union men, the overworked doctors who must never be ill themselves; the crawlers and the sloggers and blacklegs.

Coombes' language takes one right through the dust and gas, into the danger and discomfort of this unnatural business: he is not merely steeped in the lore and craft of the industry, but his words feel out that particular of which he at that moment treats. These are the apprehensions and observations of an observant and reflective man. Yet he is digressive and lacks that insufferable emphasis which, in my experience, the typical Durham master wields. And he is forever starting afresh on each several grievance which is the miner's heritage, and passing on without brandishing any master-key. The question which engulfs all is the gaping incompatibility of human poverty and mineral wealth, tragedy

amid aloof officialdom, ugliness amid the ruins and makings of beauty. And there is a gentle irony in his sense of comparison, but fairness swamps all and there is no outburst, no culminating indictment.

There is a discussion on keen gardeners and those who would offer a political cure for bad weather, for all the time Coombes favours a widening of aspect and diversions. And he feels that a wise control of resources would alleviate the crabbed and grisly fate of these valleys.

There are some very well-suited, greyish illustrations. Also some good moments of humour. On Wednesday many miners of agricultural extraction don leggings and proceed with sticks to Neath market, where they sagaciously prod cows they can never buy. Imagine Bert's amusement as he sees "a picture of Mr. Robert Foot, the new Chairman of the Mining Association, going into a mine. It seemed that was the first time he had that pleasant experience, and the paper printed it as an added qualification. He was talking to a mine boy, and this lad informed him that he hoped to become a colliery manager. . . . With the evidence right before his eyes he should have known that the way to get a really worth-while post in the mining world is to get the job first and go underground afterwards."

Then the usual jokes about us Bevin Boys. Then the procession of all the Churches together on Whit Monday. Then: "In the stalls, or working places of the colliers, I notice how each absent man has left his smell behind him. The one who ate onions with his snap of food, the other who washes with scented soap, the brilliantine which slicked another's hair, the plug tobacco which another chewed to his content, the minty smell of another's chewing-gum, they have all left their scent to remind us while above them all is the smell of human sweat mixed with coal-dust."

WILLIAM GARNETT

NEW NOVELS

- The Pursuit of Love. By NANCY MITFORD. *Hamish Hamilton*. 8s. 6d.
- Of Many Men. By JAMES ALDRIDGE. *Michael Joseph*. 8s. 6d.
- The Crater's Edge. By STEPHEN BAGNALL. *Hamish Hamilton*. 6s.

Everybody will remember that encouraging moment on page 108 of *Finnegans Wake* when, into the sleeping mind of H. C. Earwicker, as he

He: Think I've got a cold coming on



She: Then we'll both gargle with MILTON

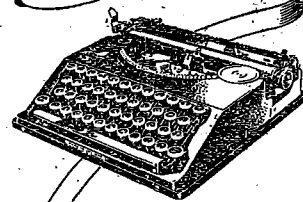
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toils over the difficulties of Anna's elusive letter, there flow these calming words: "Now, patience; and remember patience is the great thing, and above all things else we must avoid anything like being or becoming out of patience. A good plan used by worried business folk . . . is to think of all the sinking fund of patience possessed in their conjoint names by both brothers Bruce . . ." They are words I have often used to prop; in these bad days, my mind, as in my turn I have toiled through the pages of recent fiction. Patience is needed with all of the books listed above, even with Miss Mitford's *The Pursuit of Love*, which is rewardingly funny in many places. This is the least, and indeed the most, one can say of it. It begins extremely well with a picture of the children of an aristocratic family called Radlett. Its early pages introduce, in Uncle Matthew and Captain Warbeck, two of the best comic figures in any modern novel. I cannot recall a funnier picture of the violent foreigner-hating patriarch than Uncle Matthew; his early morning foibles are beautifully recorded:

He raged round the house, clanking cups of tea, shouting at his dogs, roaring at the housemaids, cracking the stock whips which he had brought back from Canada on the lawn with a noise greater than gun-fire, and all to the accompaniment of Galli Curci on his gramophone, an abnormally loud one with an enormous horn, through which would be shrieked "Una voce poco fa"—"The Mad Song" from *Lucia*—"Lo, here the gen-tel lar-ha-hark"—and so on, played at top speed, thus rendering them even higher and more screeching than they ought to be.

. . . the spell was broken when he went all the way to Liverpool to hear Galli Curci in person. The disillusionment caused by her appearance was so great that the records remained ever after silent, and were replaced by the deepest bass voices that money could buy.

But, alas, though Uncle Matthew dodges in and out of the whole book, the later pages are given over to the affairs of one of his daughters, Linda. It is to her that the title refers. The less successful episodes in her pursuit—her marriages with the banker Kroesig, and with Talbot, the middle-class Communist (a brilliant sketch)—are convincing enough; but at a moment of despair she is picked up by a French duke and installed as his mistress, and thenceforward the novel has the sentimental staginess of the late W. J. Locke. It has a certain characteristic contemporary wistfulness in its English admiration for the high-handed way in which upper-class French Catholics are presumed to fornicate, and one is

interested to learn that the French are surprised if a woman does not express *honte* after a night with a lover. But it has also a dreadfully soft centre, and one is not surprised that Fabrice should eventually discover that what he feels for his enslaved mistress is the real right thing. They have both become unbelievable by the time Miss Mitford finally polishes them off; and in the later pages the eruptions of Uncle Matthew preparing to hold his house against the German invasion are a great relief:

"I reckon," Uncle Matthew would say proudly, "that we shall be able to stop them for two hours—possibly three—before we are all killed. Not bad for such a little place."

Of *Many Men* and *The Crater's Edge* each exemplify an extreme of mannerism which we may expect in war-fiction for many years to come. *Of Many Men* is the extremely hard-boiled type of war-novel, *The Crater's Edge* the extremely soft-boiled type. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the prose style of the two writers; in offering for the reader's judgment a little example of each, I am reminded of yet another of Joyce's persuasive remarks: "When a part so ptee does duty for the holos we soon grow to use of an allforabit." Here, for instance, is a characteristic narrative passage from Mr. Aldridge:

Wolfe entered Damascus with the French. The day after they arrived the Germans invaded Russia. Wolfe got the first Nairn bus that went to Baghdad and then he flew over the dead mountains to Teheran.

The Russians in Teheran said they were sorry that Wolfe had been in Finland, very sorry; but if he waited maybe he would get a visa. He waited a long time and the Red Army was still retreating to the Dnieper when he left Teheran. He could not get a visa.

The Germans were also in the Western Desert now. They had pushed the British back into Egypt and had encircled and isolated the Australians at Tobruk. Wolfe went into Tobruk on one of the relief boats.

And here we have Mr. Bagnall:

If a girl loves someone at the age of sixteen for whom she has protested the madness of her love as a child of eight, even then he cannot be sure of her constancy, because, since nothing came of that protestation, nothing has flowered, and therefore nothing has had any opportunity to either flourish or die. Rather it has been in a state of perennial bud. So at first he made a noble decision of renunciation. Or perhaps it was not so much a decision he made as an attitude that he

The New Statesman and Nation, February 2, 1946 struck. Because he knew all the time he would not remain faithful to it. Yet he held it long enough to crystallise, or perhaps embalm, it in a sonnet of great-hearted finality and generous resolve.

Generous himself at this point, Mr. Bagnall spares us the sonnet; but he spares us little else. His theme is one of those old, well-tried ones, which were never any good even when new: the theme of the dying man reliving the past. Not even vivid interludes can remove the distrust one has for a story whose end is also its beginning; and Mr. Bagnall's story has no vivid interludes. It is merely a series of lush reminiscences about the hero's four loves: his love for a ballet dancer (platonically), for a schooldays' friend ("without lust"), for a girl called Celia (with), and for the youthful Elizabeth (the real right thing once more). With its juicy, self-admiring prose, its purple passages, its recklessly misrelated particulars and its lengthy commonplaces about the major problems of life, it is not an easy book to read.

The point of Mr. Aldridge's book lies in a quotation which prefaces it: "War is the shape of many men, those in the sun and those in the shade; many hands clear the shade, but in truth they have only succeeded when the last shadow is gone." The book begins with its hero, Wolfe, emerging from the Civil War in Spain; during the next few years, in an unspecified capacity, he tours the second world war in Finland, Norway, Syria, Africa, Malaya, the Pacific, Italy and Germany; the facility with which he gets about will be seen in the passage I have quoted. After VE Day he announces his intention of returning to Spain, and the point of the book is made clear. Presumably if Mr. Aldridge had waited a month or two longer, we could have accompanied his hero to the bombing of Hiroshima (doubtless inside the actual aircraft) and to the meetings of Hirohito and MacArthur. The pity is that even when we have had the overwhelming courtesy to accept Mr. Aldridge's style as a means of communication, he appears to have nothing to communicate beyond his central statement; the scenes we visit as we fly from one battle-front to another are stupefyingly machine-made. And though none will doubt the truth of his epigraph, and few will doubt its application to Spain, it is a pretty bald gag to write a book about.

HENRY REED

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