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WRITERS' GALLERY

Biographical Sketches ot Prominent British Writers, and their views on Reconstruction

by

DONALD BROOK

ROCKLIPP PUBLISHING CORPORATION, BTMITED
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FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1944
SECOND IMPRESSION (9TH THOUSAND) 1945

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
RANKIN BROTHERS LIMITED, BRISTOL

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INTRODUCTION

"WHAT a queer-looking young man . . . I'm sure he must be an author!" exclaimed a lady of my acquaintance with whom I was walking along Tottenham Court Road recently. Now there were only two unusual features about the appearance of the gentleman she indicated: one was that his hair had not been cut for a year, and the other was that he was wearing red trousers; so why did my friend jump to the conclusion that he was an author? The answer, of course, is that an author is supposed to be a queer, eccentric individual whose existence is rather like that of some curious exotic plant which thrives only in the hot and humid atmosphere of a greenhouse in Kew Gardens, and which produces mysterious flowers and weird fruit at irregular intervals.

Now this is not quite fair, because most of the writers of to-day lead normal lives, eating the same rations, paying the same rates and taxes, and enduring the same bureaucratic tyrannies as the rest of us. The red-trousered gentleman might have been an art student, a budding poet, or possibly a musician, for there are plenty of them in the Bloomsbury district; but on the other hand, investigation would probably have proved that he was a suburban insurance agent with extreme political views.

I frequently travel in a train used by the people who work in one of the well-known film studios near London, and very often find myself sitting opposite luscious young ladies who try to convince such utterly commonplace passengers as myself that they are film stars. The majority of them, I find, are either "extras" or "stand-ins" (not "step-ins", which, I understand, are something quite different) and have about as much chance of glittering in the realm of stardom as I have of becoming Archbishop of Canterbury. In all the artistic professions, it is invariably the very showy people who are the failures, and who are scared stiff that you will know it.

Another popular fallacy which I ought to explode is the conclusion that authors who have got into the front rank make vast fortunes out of every book published for them, and therefore it is entirely due to these greedy intellectuals that books are so dear to buy. I admit that very occasionally a book gets caught up by some craze of the hour and earns a few thousand pounds for its author in a couple of weeks,

but for every one of these there are about one hundred which bring in rather less than a hundred pounds to their authors; and when you consider that a full-length novel frequently represents five or six months' hard work, I think you will agree that the remuneration is not very good.

There is also the idea that a popular, successful author not only wallows in luxury, but receives honours comparable to those bestowed upon royalty. Lord Mayors are supposed to fall at his feet, while a glorious company of ambassadors and foreign princes receive him into the circles of the *elite.* What actually happens when an author finds that his latest book has suddenly become a "best-seller" is rather different. The local curate calls and coolly demands five pounds for his Assistant Clergy Fund; an aggressive, vinegary woman appears from nowhere to beg a contribution to some Moral Welfare Society; all the cranks in the country bombard him with letters, pamphlets and appeals; innumerable country parsons invite him to come (at his own expense) and open bazaars and jumble sales; and all the local tradesmen make a mental note to charge him tuppence extra on everything that is not controlled in price. That is only the beginning. I could fill this book with stories I have heard. I was told only a week or so ago that a well-known novelist was once offered £100 to sign a ready-written testimonial extolling the efficacy of Somebody's Cure for Piles. Fortunately he had a sense of humour.

It is chiefly because so many people arc interested in the lives of their favourite authors and yet have such erroneous ideas about them, that 1 have written these sketches. But there are other reasons too; one of which I must mention.

In the past, many authors have written books expressing in one way or another their opinions of the mismanaged social order and of the tragic sequence of events which led up to the present war. Naturally, their readers are now anxious to know their views on the tremendous difficulties that lie ahead of us in the great reconstruction of the European nations and in the establishment of a better social order at home. So as far as possible, 1 have tried to give tliis information, but as yon will sec, some have commented at length, others have made only the briefest observations, and a few have preferred to "hold their peace".

This brings me to another point which I must emphasize. All the opinions expressed in these biographical sketches are of the biographees concerned, and I have done my best to record them frdnkly and impartially. So if you disagree with, shall we say, the views of

Mr. J. B. Priestley, or with Mr. Middleton Murry's pacifism, or with Mr. Gilbert Frankau's views on the future of the Public Schools, please don't abuse me! I have deliberately made this a "mixed bag", there are Conservatives, Liberals and Socialists; Roman Catholics, Protestants and Atheists; novelists, dramatists and journalists.

I do not pretend that this book is a *complete* survey of the more distinguished writers of to-day. Several prominent authors have been omitted because owing to wartime circumstances I have been unable to get into touch with them. This applies especially to some of the younger writers, whose absence I very much regret. Others have been left out because they were unable to give me sufficient material for more than a couple of paragraphs.

It will be observed that I have dodged all questions of precedence by arranging my subjects in alphabetical order, and that, of course, is why I have started with a prominent journalist instead of your favourite novelist!

DONALD BROOK

LONDON,
Summer 1943

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all those who have helped me in collecting the information contained in these sketches—authors, publishers, agents, photographers, and one or two kind library assistants. I must also express my gratitude to the British Broadcasting Corporation for permission to use the photograph of Mr. J. B. Priestley on the jacket of this book.

For the quotations I have made I make the following acknowledgements to both authors and publishers:

VERNON BARTLETT	***This is My Life***	Chatto & Windus
GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM	***Pleasant Places***	Heinemann
VERA BRITTAIN	***Testament of Youth***	Victor Gollancz
VERA BRITTAIN	***Thrice a Stranger***	Victor Gollancz
NOEL COWARD	***Present Indicative***	Heinemann
GILBERT FRANKAU	***Self Portrait***	Hutchinson
LAURENCE HOUSMAN	***'The Unexpected Years***	Jonathan Cape
NAOMI JACOB	***Me***	Hutchinson
NAOMI JACOB	***Me Again***	Hutchinson
STORM JAMESON	***No Time Like the Present***	Cassell
SHEILA KAYE-SMITH	***Three Ways Home***	Cassell
COMPTON MACKENZIE	***Literature in my Time***	Rich & Cowan
H. J. MASSINGUAM	***Remembrance***	Batsford
H. J. MASSINGUAM	***Field Fellowship***	Chapman & Hall
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM	***Tlie Summing Up***	Heinemann
A. A. MILNE	***IPs Too Late Now***	Methuen
R. H. MOTTRAM	***Autobiography***	Robert Hale
JOHN COWPER POWYS	***Autobiography***	John Lane
J. B. PRIESTLEY	***Angel Pavement***	Dent
J. B. PRIESTLEY	***Rain Upon Godshill***	Heinemann
CECIL ROBERTS	***Half-Way***	Hutchinson
FRANK SWINNERTON	***Nocturne***	Oxford University Press
FRANK SWINNERTON	***Autobiography***	Hutchinson
FRANK SWINNERTON	***The Georgian Literary Scene***	Dent
H. A. VACHELL	***Distant Fields***	Cassell
H. G. WELLS	***Experiment in Autobiography***	Gollancz
II. G. WELLS	***Plioenix***	Seeker & Warburg

VERNON BARTLETT

I READ somewhere recently that the first thing to do when you are writing a biography of a man is to get him born. That, I suppose, is obvious, but I can't help feeling that to have the baby on the first line of the book—on the doorstep, as it were—is a trifle crude. On the other hand, I dislike even more the sort of biography in which on the*fiftieth page the reader is told that the person concerned was born on the day when Queen Victoria visited Wigan, and in the town that is famous for bulls'-eyes. That is wrapping the baby up a bit too much.

Having said that, I can proceed to tell you that Vernon Bartlett was born at Westbury, Wiltshire, in 1894. He tells me that his parents were of middle-class, solid yeoman stock; and that he had a swarm of uncles who later drifted all over the world—Minnesota, Oregon, Argentina and New Zealand being, for example, the destinations of four of them. As a child he inherited their restlessness, for he was never out of mischief. When he was a boy the family lived near Bournemouth, and the neighbouring farmers must have got a little tired of the fierce young cowboy and his gang who "rounded up" their sheep and cattle with bows and arrows and air-guns, and who had a dangerous habit of allowing their camp-fires to get out of control. Likewise, in the town the local police rarely enjoyed a spell of "duty" at a cricket or football match because that little imp with his catapult liked to hear the tinkle-tinkle of glass falling from the street lamps.

He was born a journalist, of course. Although he received no payment for enlivening his preparatory school magazine (a gelatine-duplicated affair) with blood-curdling stories of Red Indians, he earned a useful half-guinea on one occasion by writing an enthusiastic testimonial about his dog's preference for Somebody's Dog Biscuits. Actually, the animal had sniffed them cautiously and then walked disdainfully away. Moreover, he won honours in the London Matriculation with a glowing essay on the scenery of Scotland, although he had never been north of Derby.

Bartlett was educated at BlundelPs School, and at the age of seventeen went abroad to study languages, with the intention of entering the Consular Service. He stayed first in Bromberg, a small

town in what used to be the Polish Corridor, and fell so madly in love with his host's daughter that he was inspired to write his first novel *Calf Love* as a result.

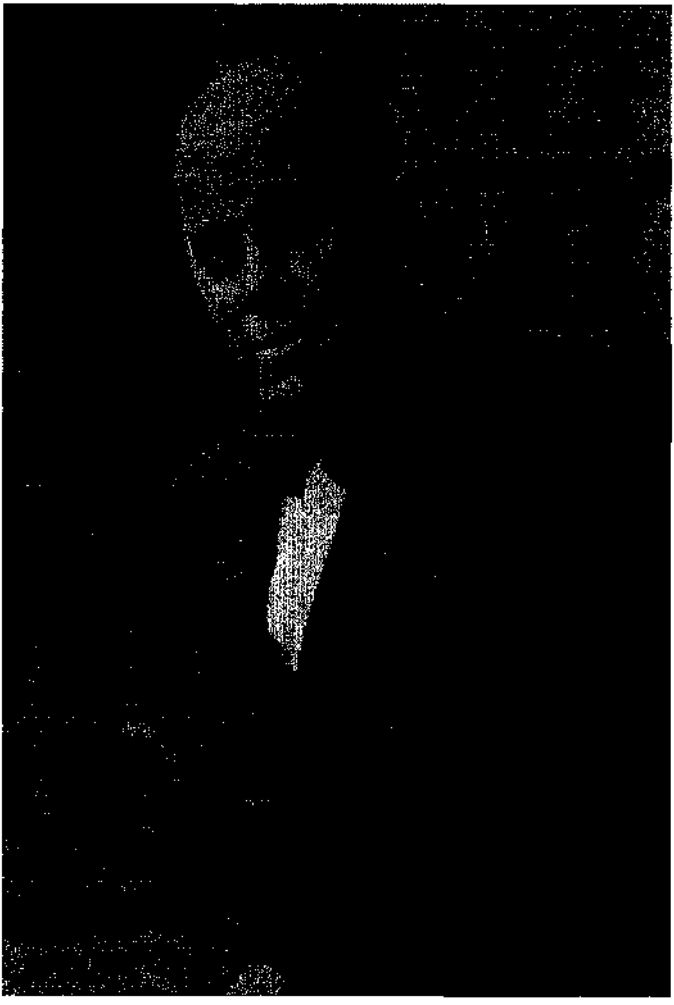
He visited Florence, Paris and Madrid before his father decided that he had better try to earn his own living for a change, and found him a post in the City. He disliked it and left almost immediately By his own efforts he got a job as an English teacher in a languages school in Berlin at 80s. a week, but his scholastic career ended abruptly a few months later when the proprietor of the school found him with one of the private pupils—a blonde young lady—sitting on his knee.

With complete plans for the next stage in his career he returned to England to see his father, but before the arrangements for his future could be completed, the Great War was declared. He joined up immediately in a superior organization known as the University and Public Schools Battalion, chiefly because it was "the thing to do. ' lie felt no bitterness against the German people, in fact his own memories of them were of nothing biu generous hospitality and great kindness.

On the strength of his experience in the Officers' Training Corps at school, he received a commission in the Dorset Regiment, lie went to France, and was amazed at the "humiliating inferiority" of our armaments. He was lightly wounded and spent his twenty-first birthday in a hospital train. On the very day of his return to the front he was walking around the trenches when the sergeant accompanying him had the back of his head blown away. He describes the poor man's condition in *This is My Life,* adding, "I turned away and was horribly sick. But I think it was from that moment that 1 decided I must do what little I could to prevent another war. For the Acts of God one could not be responsible. But this sudden change from strong, cheerful, courageous manhood to a thing which was part cornic and part obscene was an Act of Man. Somehow that sort of thing must be ended."

* * * • *

Vernon Bartlctt was invalided out of the Army in 1916, and drifted into journalism. He met Max Pemberton, who introduced him to the editor of the *Daily Mirror,* in which appeared his first articles on "mud, batmen, barbed wire and other military matters". These brought him the offer of a job as a reporter on the *Daily Mail* at £3 a week. One of his assignments was to interview wounded



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Vernon Bartlett

Photcgraph by Madame Yevonde

Vera Brittain

soldiers returning from the front and to get their war stories, but he found it too harrowing a task, and instead made up stories of his own.

He got tired of doing this, so he took an appointment with Reuter's as assistant to the diplomatic representative. It was part of his work to keep in touch with the Labour Party's movements, and he became well known to such leaders as Arthur Henderson and Arthur Greenwood. He was also one of the four Reuter correspondents to attend the Peace Conference, and had the honour of being present at the famous luncheon given in Paris to welcome President Wilson.

Of the Plenary Session of the Versailles Conference he says in *This is My Life,* "Shortly before the German delegates were invited to Versailles a high fence was erected round a small bit of the park so that they could wander around behind it like animals in a zoo. It so happened that a Press photographer took a picture of me when I was standing by this fence trying to see how strong it was, and this picture was unfortunately published in a London newspaper with the caption: 'Hun delegate tries prison bars.' . . . The day on which the Versailles Treaty was published I went off to a lovely beech-wood in Buckinghamshire to read the oflicial summary of it prepared by my old friend and predecessor at the League of Nations Office, G. H. Mair. I have never gone back to that wood, so filled with bitter memories, for paragraph after paragraph of that luckless treaty made it obvious that so many of my friends had died in vain and that all this talk about a war to end war had been nothing but a series of damnable lies."

For a few weeks Vernon Bartlett acted as the Paris correspondent to the newly-revived *Daily Herald,* which was then edited by George Lansbury, and then went to *The Times,* first as secretary to the editor, Wickham Steed, and afterwards as correspondent in Switzerland.

I would add here that Vernon Bartlett was one of the first British newspapermen to visit Germany after the Great War, and he was surprised to find that the people received him in a spirit of friendly pacifism. In his autobiography he declares, "There *was* a chance then to make a decent and a lasting peace. The relief that war was over, the conviction that it had been a most disastrous futility, the readiness to accept defeat if it meant an end of bitterness and hostility - -these feelings *were* genuine, and they were those of the overwhelming mass of the population. Many crimes against common sense and decency have been committed by the Germans in this century.

There is at least one great crime on the other side—the refusal to make a generous peace."

He also served *The Times* as correspondent in Rome and in various parts of Europe where there was trouble; in Germany, for instance, during the Kapp Putsch, and in Poland during the Russo-Polish war of 1920.

He left Rome just as Mussolini came into power—it was advisable to do so since he had been critical of Fascism—in order to become London Director of the League of Nations Secretariat; a post which he held for ten years. From 1928 onwards he became chief broadcaster on foreign affairs for the BBC, and travelled for that Corporation to almost every country in Europe, from which his broadcasts were often relayed. He sometimes expressed views that were not officially approved, and as his position tended more and more to suppress his individuality, he resigned at the end of 1933 to become Diplomatic Correspondent to the *News Chronicle.*

* * * * *

His work with the BBC gave him a remarkably wide experience, and he became a prominent figure at Geneva, which he describes as one of the dullest cities in Europe. He frequently criticized the League because of the later practice of arriving at decisions in secret, and in his autobiography he tells how all the journalists used to wander for hours up and down the long corridors discussing rumours and occasionally starting them themselves chiefly to make bets on the period that elapsed before a recognizable version of them came back to their own ears!

Vernon Bartlett also tells how he once shared a sleeping compartment with a Foreign Minister from one of the new countries in Eastern Europe.' He woke up very thirsty during the night and climbed down from his upper berth, got a drink, and climbed back again without turning on the light so that his neighbour should not be disturbed. A few moments later the Foreign Minister turned on the light and went "very carefully and very ostentatiously through all his pockets" to see what had been stolen.

One of his later memories of Geneva—after he had left the BBC —was the Emperor of Abyssinia's impassioned appeal to the League to stop the Italian invasion of his country.

Mr. Bartlett has interviewed almost every prominent politician in Europe. In his first interview with Hitler he was amazed that so

great a country could be ruled by a man who uttered little else but platitudes, and he declares in his autobiography that while Hitler was shouting and screaming at him he noticed that the Fiihrer was almost in a trance. "The man is obviously abnormal, and yet amazingly shrewd. Nobody, at any rate in history, has had such an amazing gift for playing on the prejudices of the crowd."

Vernon Bartlett met Mussolini on several occasions, and in private conversation he thought the Duce seemed fairly intelligent, yet whenever he heard him speak in public he was shocked by the "bombastic nonsense" poured out before the Italian people. Bartlett claims to be the only Englishman who (before Mussolini's ignominious downfall) kept the Duce waiting for an hour! This was due to a porter's failure to deliver a communication from the Italian Foreign Office.

True to his policy of being on the scene wherever there is trouble, Vernon Bartlett visited the Republican armies in Spain twice during the Civil War, and he also flew to China early in the Sino-Japanese war.

He made frequent visits to Germany before the outbreak of the present war until the Nazis decided that they were not keen on his company. Their ban was temporarily removed so that he could accompany Mr. Chamberlain to Berchtesgadcn, Godesburg and Munich. After that last meeting with Hitler he returned to England so angry over the Munich policy that he fought a by-election at Bridgwater, Somerset, and to his own and everybody's surprise, won it as a Progressive Independent.

He visited the Maginot Line shortly before the fall of France, and went by Northern convoy to Russia in August 1941 for the Ministry of Information.

* * * * *

Vernon Bartlett is now the Diplomatic Adviser of the *News Chronicle,* and in addition to heavy journalistic and parliamentary duties broadcasts regularly in the European and Overseas services of the BBC.

Another of his recent activities was the organisation of the first all-party Committee on Agriculture in the House of Commons. He believes that international peace is impossible unless the standard of living of the primary producers in every country is maintained at a reasonably high level.

He founded the *World Review* in 1934 and acted as its editor fan

over six years. He also collaborated with R. C. Sherriff in the writing of *Journey's End* as a novel, and has written several books on international affairs. His latest is *Tomorrow Always Comes.*

When Mr. Bartlett married Miss Marguerite van den Gemden, of Antwerj), they were obliged to settle somewhere within fairly easy reach of London, and took a house at Gerrard's Cross full of "old oak beams made of stained deal". They now Have a town house in Gowcr Street, Bloonisbury, and a charming cottage at Byworth, near Petworth, Sussex,—and two sons.

* * * * *

1 think it likely that Vernon Bartlett will continue his Independent path in politics, at least for a considerable time. In *This is My Life* he says, "I now know that I admire British Conservatives for their patriarchal and often entirely disinterested social service. That I admire British supporters of the Labour Party for their sturdy common sense and good humour. That I admire British Liberals for their belief in principles. And I know that I belong to none of those parties. Had it not been for the Moscow trials I might have become a Communist. Were it not for the trade-union influence I might join the Labour Party. Were it not for their strange blending of bloodlessncss and sentimentality I might belong to the Liberals. Had the Tories not been so selfish and short-sighted about Spain I might have become one of them. But I see nothing to choose between the Conservative and the Communist types of class warfare, and I care for neither." That was written in August 1937, but I do not think that events during the past few years have caused him to alter his outlook in any significant way.

* * * * *

Vernon Bartlett believes that most people look upon the Beveridge Report as a recognition of a new conception of economics, i.e. that wealth does not depend upon the amount of gold a nation possesses but upon the brains and muscles of its people, and therefore the prosperity of the primary producers is absolutely essential. Our own agriculture must be maintained efficiently, but that does not mean that we should exclude from our country the masses of good things of which other countries have an exportable surplus. "What we most want to avoid," he declares, "is that international competition in which each country seeks to export regardless of the way

in which, in order to do so, it has to reduce the standard of living of the people within its frontiers."

He advocates an inter-Allied agreement upon the extent to which each of the United Nations can achieve prosperity by the development of its own home market, and in order to abolish unemployment he feels that we must have large-scale public works, even though (for the time being at any rate) we arc unable to balance our budgets.

To remove the possibility of other governments losing confidence in our currency, Mr. Bartlett suggests an inter-Allied agreement upon the establishment of two currencies; one to facilitate the international exchange of goods, and the other to facilitate exchange -within each nation's own frontiers. We must on no account postpone social progress "because we cannot afford it".

He believes that the League of Nations came remarkably near to success, because so many nations were prepared to take risks in order that Italy's invasion of Abyssinia should be stopped. It failed because it was not world-wide and had no skeleton police force at its disposal. This war, Mr. Bartlett declares, should have taught us that, in Litvinoffs famous phrase, peace is indivisible.

"But the claim that we must all leap on the aggressor, wherever he happens to get busy, is both unnecessary and outside the grasp of the ordinary imagination. Should our obligation to take action not be confined to regions in which our interests are obvious to our own people? If so, can we avoid the danger that these regional groups will develop a rivalry that must end in war? In these groups can the great and small powers work together in harmony?"

To such questions as these Mr. Bartlett maintains that the answer is in the ailirmative, but only if we lay emphasis rather on obligations than on rights; rather on what we are prepared to put into the pool than on what we expect to get out of it. "Thus, if the United States, or the British Empire, having interests in Eastern Asia, were to demand representation on an Eastern Asiatic Regional Council, they would be accepting the same obligation to prevent war in that region as one of the states that lies wholly inside it. And the more states were represented in two or three regional councils, the more links there would be between them and the greater the chances of Agreement in the supreme council to which such regional councils sent their delegates."

Mr. Bartlett tells me that it should not be difficult to devise a system whereby every country, great or small, had a voice in the

world government in proportion to the value of the contribution it is prepared to make to the international development of the world's potential wealth. This, he thinks, can best be done within the framework of a re-constituted League of Nations, but there must be an adequate international police force to see that the laws of the League are properly observed by everybody.

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

"C OERGE A. BIRMINGHAM" is the *nom de plume* of the Rev. **V T J .** O. Hannay, for many years the Rector of Mells, Somerset. I am well aware that since the decline of the Church of England, novels written by clergymen are unpopular, particularly among the intelligentsia, chiefly because of the assumption that they introduce religious and ethical propaganda into their work. Mr. Hannay's books are an exception, for although none of them have become "best-sellers" or achieved any great literary distinction, they have been very popular among the members of the public and subscription libraries for the last twenty years.

He was born in Belfast in 1865, and at the age of nine was sent to this country to Temple Grove Preparatory School, East Sheen, Mortlake, Surrey. The headmaster in those days was a good scholar, but did not spare the rod. He believed in a thrashing as a cure, not only for misbehaviour but also for inability to solve mathematical problems! James Owen Hannay was a typical schoolboy; he kept white mice in his desk, and knew how to manipulate a penknife to carve his name, but he distinguished himself neither in work nor in games. In due course he proceeded to Haileybury, and continued his mediocre record. We are told in *Pleasant Places,* his autobiography, that the bullying here was so vicious that the elder boys made the lives of the juniors "a perfect hell". Small and weak boys found that life simply wasn't worth living. It is interesting to note that in the same book Mr. Hannay does not favour the system of masters relying upon their pupils' honour, which he considers to be a thing almost entirely lacking in schoolboys. I wonder what Mr. H. A. Vachell would say in reply to that rather sweeping statement!

Mr. Hannay went to Trinity College, Dublin, in 1883, where he met Miss Adelaide Wynne, the daughter of the incumbent of a local church, whom he subsequently married. He was ordained in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, in 1888, and obtained a country curacy.

The income of a young curate in those days was barely sufficient for a married man, and on one occasion the Hannays found themselves confronted with a coal bill for nearly ten pounds without having the means of settling it. Mr. Hannay decided to write a short story and to send it to a magazine editor in the hope of earning at

least something towards the amount required by the coal merchant. 11 is first effort was successful, and was bought by *Temple Bar*—for ten pounds! This, I think, was undoubtedly a case of "beginner's luck". It also brought him an invitation from a London publisher to submit a novel, but this never materialized, for although he wrote several chapters, it was left unfinished because his parochial duties took up too much of his time.

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Mr. Hannay wrote nothing else for fifteen years. He moved to the west coast of Ireland where he accepted the living of Westport. In his autobiography he tells us a great deal about the lives of the simple folk to whom he ministered, and some of them were very curious individuals. The standard of living among the smaller farmers was the lowest imaginable; one farm consisted of a single-roomed structure in which lived (and slept) the farmer and his wife, his daughter and her husband, two cows, a calf, a couple of pigs, a dog "and a whole flock of hens which roosted on the rafters". And the daughter had her first baby on the premises, if you please.

The farmers saved their money very carefully for years to provide their daughters with dowries, without which the girls had very little chance of getting married. Romantic marriages were exceptional, most matches being made by the parents with little regard for the feelings of the young people concerned.

Shortly before Mr. Hannay resumed his writing he performed various minor literary tasks, and contributed some small articles to *Hastings's Dictionary.* "I wrote a few," he tells us in his autobiography, **but I backed out of the others which I rashly undertook. Among those I did not write were some on Christian Marriage and kindred subjects. I once got a post-card from the editor urging me on: 'There is no hurry about Marriage . . . but please get Adultery done at once!' The dictionary was appearing in parts, arranged alphabetically. Hence the hurry for Adultery."

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Mr. Hannay started writing in earnest when his eldest son became old enough to go to school, as the difficulty of finding the school-fees was beginning to worry him. In a few months his first novel *The Seething Pot* was in the hands of Mr. A. P. Watt, the literary agent. It was hand-written, because its author could not afford the expense of having it typewritten, and was sent to eleven publishers before Edward Arnold accepted it—on very poor terms. However, it

encouraged Mr. Hannay to write more, and when his third book appeared, his pen was earning him over a hundred pounds a year. I hope Master Hannay appreciated his father's toil to provide him with a good education.

The pseudonym "George A. Birmingham" was adopted, not in honour of our great midland city, but because it was a common name in the county in which Mr. Hannay was living. His books brought him a great many friends, particularly journalists, whose company he invariably enjoys.

He was invited to contribute occasional articles to the *Morning Leader,* and was soon writing regularly about Irish life for the *St. James's Gazette,* the *Pall Mall Gazette,* and the *Daily Mail.*

Spanish Gold was his first novel to be a notable success, and it banished his financial worries for ever. The proceeds enabled him to fulfil one of his greatest desires: the possession of a boat. Mr. and Mrs. Hannay bought a dinghy and called it *Mary Kate* after the little girl in the book that provided it. It was a great joy to them, and they spent many happy days sailing it in Clew Bay.

After the production of his first play in Dublin, Mr. Hannay wrote *General John Regan,* which Sir Charles Hawtrcy produced at the Apollo theatre, playing the principal part himself. To obtain the right clothes for this Irish play, Mrs. Hannay went about the Westport district offering the local inhabitants new clothes in exchange for old ones, so that when the play opened, the players were dressed in garments (thoroughly disinfected!) that had actually been worn by Irish peasants. It was a great success. Another company immediately staged it in New York, and some twenty years later it was made into a film.

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During the Great War, Mr. Hannay served as an Army Chaplain, and wrote *A Padre in France* to record his experiences. In his autobiography he relates that when he arrived at a camp in Boulogne, he was greeted with the emphatic declaration, "We want no bloody parsons here", but on the whole, he was well received by the men and did a great deal of good work among them.

After his demobilization, he travelled with his wife on the continent for two or three years, visiting, among other places, Dinard, Prague and Budapest, where he acted as Chaplain to the British Legation for two years. He was appointed Rector of Mells, Somerset, on his return, and worked there until he moved to Holy Trinity, Kensington, in 1934.

His latest books are *Wild Justice* (1980), *Fed Up* (1931), *The Silver-GiU Standard* (1932), *AngeVs Adventure* (1933), *Two Fools* (1984), *MiUicenVs Corner* (1935), *Mrs. Miller's Aunt* (1986), *Magilligan Strand* (1938), *Appeasement* (1939), *Over the Border* (1942), and *Poor Sir Edward* (1943).

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Mr. Hannay's views on the reconstruction of the social order after the war may be summarized in the statement that he wants to see the people living in the freedom for which they are supposed to be fighting. He told me recently that the first and most important thing we have to do after the Armistice is to get rid of all the exasperating restrictions that make our lives a burden at the present time, and to clear out the people who delight in making them as irksome as they can. When that has been done, everything should come right in time

VERA BRITTAIN

WHAT does Vera Brittain think about the present war? Is she still a pacifist? I have heard these questions on several occasions recently, so I will try to answer them in this little sketch. But first let me summarize her life-story.

Although she was born at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, she spent her early childhood in Macclesfield in a conventional middle-class family circle. Her father was the proprietor of some local paper mills. She had little opportunity for reading in those days, as her home contained very few books apart from a number of the more popular novels; though she got to know something of Dickens, because her mother used to read passages from his works on Sunday afternoons. A governess was engaged for her early education, which she received in the company of her brother Edward, who was two years her junior.

When she was eleven, the family moved to Buxton, the Derbyshire spa, and the two children were sent to a private day school in the town. Two years later she went as a boarder to St. Monica's School, Kingswood, Surrey; a fashionable establishment which at that time was more concerned with the preparation of young ladies for society life than with education for a career, as the curriculum provided no adequate instruction for any of the recognized examinations. Apart from this serious deficiency, it appears to have been a fairly tolerable school.

During the holidays and after she had left school at the age of eighteen, Miss Brittain was obliged to adapt herself to the dull routine of the polite society life of Buxton, and she soon grew to detest the futile existence of most of her neighbours. It was of course the intention of her parents that she should continue to live as a model daughter of a genteel family until she could be "married off" to some suitable young man with a substantial bank balance, when she would produce smug little children at regular intervals for the next twenty years. Even if the young men had not been "physically boisterous and conversationally inept" it is extremely doubtful whether Vera Brittain would have submitted willingly to such a fate, for she had very different ideas, and pleaded continually to be allowed to go to Oxford with her brother, who would shortly be leaving Uppingham,

The Buxton ladies were naturally horrified that she should desire to do anything so unwomanly, and left her parents in no doubt about their views on "blue-stockings", so that for many tedious months she was obliged to endure a life in which her chief excitements were playing the piano at "At Homes" and listening to the sermons of a locsil curate with Rationalist inclinations. No doubt if the Buxton ladies had possessed the intelligence to understand the elements of theology they would have had something to say about him as well. Miss Brittain's impressions of the snobbish society of the smaller provincial towns in those days are ably expressed in her second novel *Not Without Honour.*

By winning an Essay Competition in connection with the Oxford Summer Meetings, she succeeded at last in persuading her father that a college education would not be wasted upon her, and with an expression of diffidence he finally gave his consent; whereupon she worked for the entrance examination with such tremendous enthusiasm that she was awarded a College Exhibition.

She went up to Oxford shortly after the outbreak of war in 1914, having spent an exasperating week or two in giving assistance to the Buxton ladies who had set about making dubious bandages and grotesque shirts for soldiers in an atmosphere of fervent gossip and incessant brewing of tea. "At the First Aid and Home Nursing Classes", we are told in *Testament of Youth,* "they cluttered about the presiding doctor like hens round a barnyard cock, and one or two of 'the Set', who never learned any of the bandages themselves, went about showing everybody else how to do them."

At the end of her first year at Somerville, she felt that she could not continue to ignore the urgent appeals for nursing recruits, and decided to abandon her studies until the end of the war to serve as a VAD. On June 27, 1915, she became a nurse at the Devonshire Hospital, Buxton, where large numbers of wounded soldiers were being cared for. She performed with exemplary zeal the more menial tasks that were invariably assigned to new VADs; being sustained, no doubt, by the amusement she found in watching the dismay of the other local ladies, who had volunteered expecting to do little else but hold the patients' hands and console them with soft words of comfort.

In due course she moved to the First London General Hospital, the military extension of St. Bartholomew's, where she had to dress the wounds of soldiers and sailors arriving in endless convoys from the hospital ships. "No sudden gift of second sight showed me the future

months in which I should not only contemplate and hold, but dress- unaided and without emotion, the quivering stump of a newly-amputated limb, than which a more pitiful spectacle hardly exists on this side of death."

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Christmas of 1015 found her excitedly awaiting a telephone call to announce the return from France of her fiancc\ Roland Leighton. She had arranged her own leave to coincide with his, so that they could spend their precious seven days together. At last the call came through—but only to announce that he had died of wounds on the previous day.

Heartbroken, her mind numbed with grief, she volunteered for service abroad, and was sent to Malta in the hospital ship *Britannic*, which was subsequently torpedoed. Life on the island was not without its compensations, though it was far from easy, for its hospitals had to accommodate the majority of the casualties from ships that had been torpedoed in the Mediterranean.

After a short spell in England, she went to France and served in the 24th General Hospital at Etaples, where at one time during the retreat from the great German offensive in 1918, the front line was only a few miles away. She had to endure all the hardships common to the men in the trenches, particularly on several occasions when the hospital was deliberately bombed. The strain was still further increased when she heard that two more of-her friends, her brother s former school-fellows, had been killed on the western front. "The enemy within shelling distance—refugee Sisters crowding in with nerves all awry—bright moonlight, and aeroplanes carrying machine guns—ambulance trains jolting noisily into the siding all day and all night—gassed men on stretchers, clawing the air—dying men reeking with mud and foul green-stained bandages, shrieking and writhing in a grotesque travesty of manhood—dead men with fixed empty eyes and shiny yellow faces...." This further quotation from *Testament of Youth* is her own account of the surroundings in which she worked week after week with little or no relief.

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A few months before the end of the war she was recalled to England to nurse her mother, who had become seriously ill. Back in Kensington, she saw the effect of the war upon some of the civil population; there was a shortage of servants, and ladies were frequently obliged to do their own domestic work!

The cruellest blow of all fell in June 1918, shortly after she had arrived back in this country, when her beloved brother Edward, who had recently won the M.C., was killed in Italy. The last of the companions of her youth had fallen.

When the Armistice was signed she was nursing at Queen Alexandra's Hospital, Millbank. The celebrations did little to brighten her desolate outlook, and when she returned to Oxford some six months later, she found it cold and unsympathetic. The colleges were treating the returning heroes with the same indifference that was being shown to them in the industrial world. After a while, however, her gloom was dispelled by a new friend, Miss Winifred Holtby, who became her companion for sixteen years.

While Miss Brittain was at Oxford the legislation allowing degrees to be conferred on women was introduced, and she witnessed Queen Mary's visit to the University to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Laws.

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Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby came down from Oxford together, and after a visit to Italy, they shared a studio in Doughty Street, Bloom sbury, where they began their literary careers by writing newspaper articles. Their slender earnings at first were supplemented by part-time teaching of history in various private schools in the London area. Miss Brittain was also accepted as a lecturer by the League of Nations Union, and she was soon addressing meetings in all parts of the country. Her first appearance as a public lecturer was at Watford. Some of her meetings were quite exciting: at one place, the previous speaker had declared that every man was his brother's keeper, and immediately Miss Brittain started her address, a youth shouted out "Oo's *your* keeper?"

She visited Geneva frequently in the early days of the League of Nations, generally as a representative of *Time and Tide,* to which she was contributing.

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Literary aspirants who are apt to become despondent when their work is rejected may be encouraged by the knowledge that Vera Brittain's first novel, *The Dark Tide,* a frank story about the women students at Oxford, was returned by almost every publisher in London before it came to the notice of Mr. Grant Richards, who was sufficiently enterprising to accept it. He never regretted his decision: the book was reviewed by seventy-three papers and magazines;

including *The Times Literary Supplement,* which devoted three-quarters of a column to it.

The average author does not expect much of a return from his first novel; indeed, he is generally gratified if it brings him something of a reputation as well as a little money. For Vera Brittain, *The Dark Tide* did more than this: it changed the whole course of her life. Soon after its first appearance, a young university lecturer sent her a criticism of it which was the start of a lengthy correspondence across the Atlantic, for he later accepted an appointment at an American college. His name was George Catlin, and he secretly resolved to marry the author of *The Dark Tide* despite the fact that she had already made up her mind to remain single. The ceremony took place at St., James's, Spanish Place, in June 1925.

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The next twelve years of her life were divided between this country and America, for her husband had been obliged to retain his appointment. She went on three lengthy lecture tours in the United States, where she was received with great enthusiasm, particularly after the success of her profound autobiography *Testament of Youth.* She was disappointed to find that many of the talented wives of American university professors were unable to undertake any type of intellectual work because the extremely high cost of domestic assistance kept them perpetually engaged in the more menial tasks of their households. "This pathetic deterioration of eager, vital feminine ability is among the pressing social problems which America has to face" she declares in *Thrice a Stranger,*

During her second tour she was able to witness the effect of the great Depression, which rocked the American continent from shore to shore, but she found a courageous people determined to put their country on a sound basis again. She was particularly impressed by the outstanding personalities of many of the American citizens who had come to the fore in those anxious days, and by the nation's determination to maintain a high intellectual standard in the schools and colleges. "My love for America has now become a passion," she writes, ". . . her hopes and desires for herself are essentially civilized aspirations with which I would gladly identify my own."

During the early years of her marriage, her home in this country was in the Earl's Court district of London, where her son John Edward was born in December 1927. Shortly before the birth of her daughter Shirley in June 1930 she took a pleasant house in Glebe

Place, Chelsea, which was also shared by her good friend Winifred Holtby, who became a beloved "Auntie" to the children. Miss Brittain's *Testament of Friendship* is a tribute to this noble woman whose sad death in 1935 robbed us of a most promising Yorkshire novelist.

In the last General Election, Miss Brittain's husband stood as the Labour candidate for Brentford and Chiswick, but was defeated, although he polled more votes than many of the members of the former Labour Cabinet.

The family moved to their present house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, in 1987.

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During the decade preceding the outbreak of the present war, Miss Brittain was a resolute pacifist. At the time of the Disarmament •Conference several popular novelists leapt into the limelight as the champions of pacifism, and "cashed-in" very nicely with fashionable denunciations of the militarists. But when the dictators began to bawl, public opinion soon inclined in the opposite direction, and most of the novelists changed their tune immediately. Writers have as much right as anybody else to change their minds, of course, but on looking back over those years, I cannot help feeling that some of them did it with more alacrity than sincerity. Vera Brittain was one of the exceptions. She has never recanted; she still believes that war cannot be justified. Even if we disagree with her, we must admire her courage, for how many writers of to-day are prepared to risk their reputations by holding such "unpopular" views? Her attitude towards the present war is set out in detail in a small book called *Humiliation with Honour* which was published last year. She is very concerned at the present time with the plight of the children in the starving countries of Europe, and has recently published a pamphlet •entitled *One of these little ones* which has attracted a considerable amount of attention. Her latest book is *Seed of Chaos* (1944).

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, Today, Miss Brittain has very definite views on the procedure we should adopt in the reconstruction of Europe after the war. She favours neither a military occupation of Germany and Italy, nor a Union of de-nationalized European States, but a re-constituted League of Nations. She appreciates that it would probably require some sort of "police force" for a few years, but believes that the League's ultimate aim should be complete disarmament. If the armament firms are to continue to exist at all, they should be under

1:he control of the League so that they could not supply individual States. The present Government should not be allowed to remain iii office when the war is over, for apart from the obvious reason that a general election is long overdue, she believes that Governments .elected for the purpose of destruction are seldom suitable for the opposite process.

She agrees with many of our contemporary writers that the work of the world's most enlightened authors should be published in all languages, and that a special scheme to encourage this would help to promote better understanding between the nations, because she maintains that the cultural ties between nations are usually the strongest and most lasting. She strongly opposes the idea of seeking Government subsidies for this work, however, for she believes that no Government should have the right to decide which writers are enlightened and which are not. Miss Brittain is evidently afraid that the piper would never have the chance of deciding his own programme!

She favours the Beveridge plan "as the next step" to ensure social security, and does not believe that its adoption would inevitably mean the loss of much of our export trade. She is also anxious to see an efficient State medical service, but dislikes the principle of compulsion in this sphere as in any other.

Although she is still a member of the Church of England, she is an "Attender" at the meetings of the Society of Friends (Quakers). She has a certain amount of sympathy for the Church, but is in favour of Disestablishment and Disendowment, provided that the wealth of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners does not go to the State. When I asked her opinion recently upon the Church's continued ownership of slum property, she agreed that if the overdue improvements could not be made at the present time, it would be more to the credit of the Church if it renounced the income from these deplorable sources And allowed the unfortunate tenants to live rent free until better accommodation became available. She also considers that other ground landlords, including the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, should be compelled to make the same sacrifice.

NOEL COWARD

TOWARDS the close of the last century, Teddington was but a. small village on the banks of the Thames, and in its parish church choir a young man named Coward met a young lady of dignified Scottish descent, and later married her. Their first child died of meningitis, but the second one, a son born on December 16, 1890, decided to survive, and was named Noel. Five years later they moved to Sutton, Surrey, where another boy, Eric, was born.

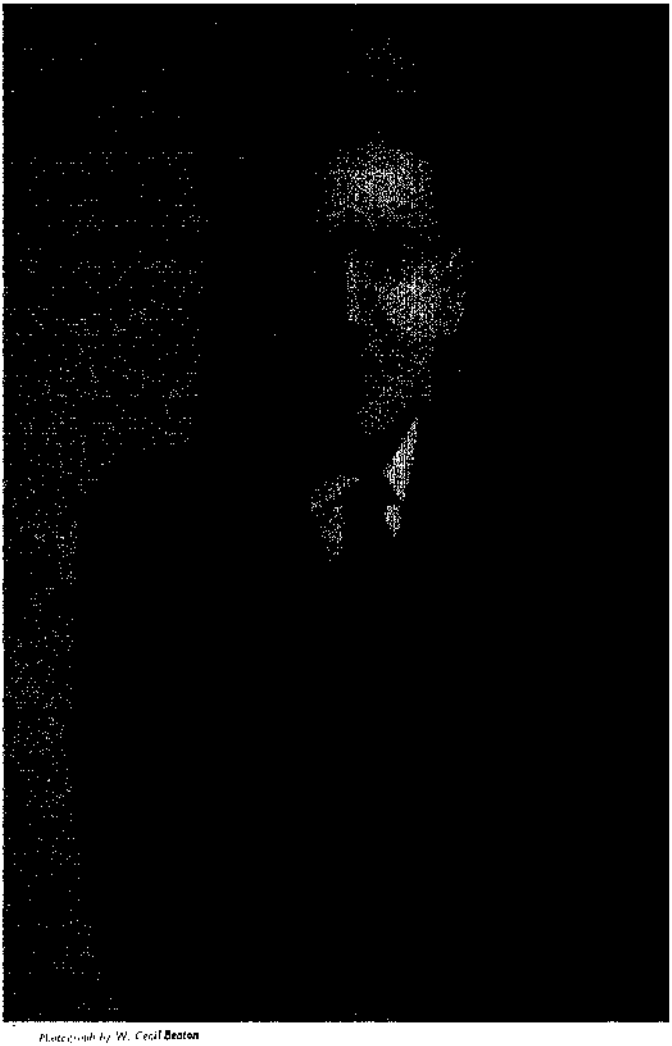
At the age of six, Noel was sent to a little private school, where he took a violent dislike to his teacher, and bit her arm. At the end of his first term he sang a song from *The Country Girl* at the school concert, an event which he now recalls as his "first public performance".

In 1908 the little family moved again to a top flat overlooking Battersea Park, and Noel was sent to the Chapel Royal School in the hope that his voice would eventually win him a choral scholarship. The choir boys he remembers as "nasty little brutes" who put ink pellets down his collar and forced his head into the w.c, so in many ways he felt relieved when he failed to get into the Chapel Royal Choir.

Like most boys he became a *Magnet* and *Gem* fan. In case you don't know, I had better explain that these are the two magazines in which such boys as Billy Bunter, Baggy Trimble, Tom Merry and Harry Wharton appear in exciting school stories.

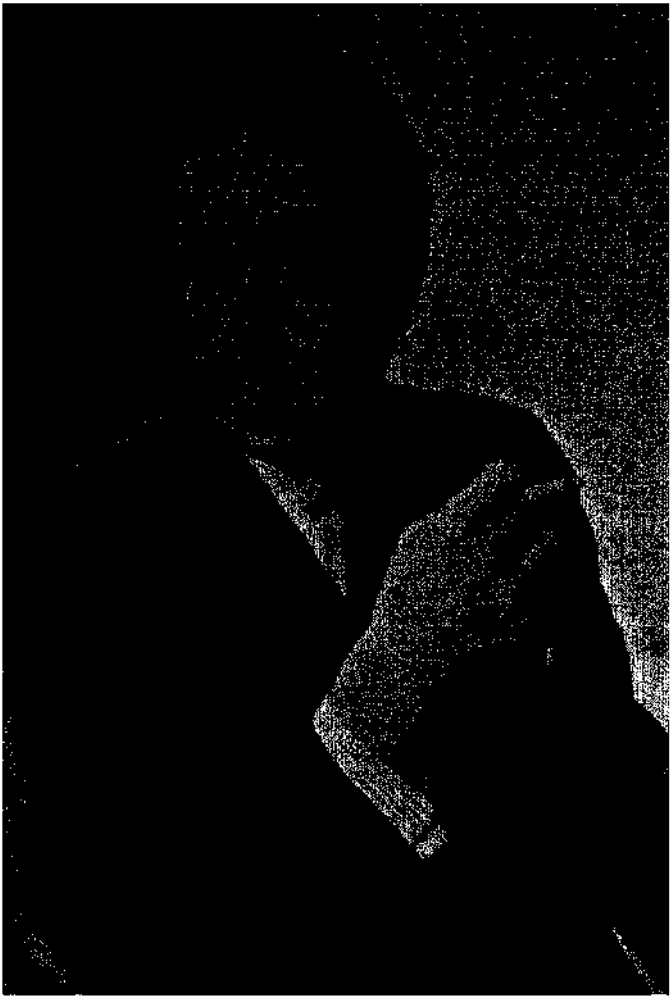
He developed a fine singing voice, and sang innumerable solos, not only in churches but at concerts and garden parties. As he seemed so much at ease on the stage, his mother arranged for him to have dancing lessons, and before the course was over he had secured an engagement to play the part of "Prince Mussel" in an "all-children fairy play" called *The Goldfish,* which was staged for short periods at the Little Theatre, Crystal Palace, and at the Court Theatre. He gloried in it; particularly as it afforded convenient opportunities to be absent from school.

His next engagement was at £2 a week to play the part of a page-boy in *The Great Name,* a comedy in which Charles Hawtrey was appearing at the Prince of Wales Theatre. The play was taken off after two months, but Hawtrey gave Noel Coward another page-boy's part in his new production of *Where the Rainbow Ends* at the Savoy.



Photograph by W. Cecil Beaton

Noel Coward



Photograph by Press Portrait eurccu

A. J. Cronin

His schoolfellows must have been green with envy, for he was frequently invited with the company to parties at the Savoy, and he can still remember the silver trays of chocolate Eclairs, which received his special attention! He made the most of his opportunities, and on the strength of his membership of Hawtrey's company he bombarded the theatre managers with requests for *fyee* seats—and sometimes succeeded in getting them.

After one or two other engagements he was taken on again by Charles Hawtrcy in a sketch called *A Little Fowl Play* at the Coliseum, but when he applied for the necessary licence to perform, the magistrate refused to give it because the sketch did not come on until about eleven o'clock in the evening. Another occasion on which a magistrate proved troublesome was when he was playing for a few weeks in a Repertory Company in Manchester. A licence was granted only on condition that he went to a school every day. He went to a local elementary school, but when during a lesson a master questioned him upon the subject being taught he burst into such a tirade that all hope of teaching him anything was abandoned, and he was allowed to sit and do nothing but glower sullenly at everybody around him.

In November 1913—when he was about fourteen—he was engaged to play "Slightly" in *Peter Pan,* both in the London production and in a tour of the provinces. At about that time he became very friendly with Esme Wynne, a successful juvenile actress, and they became inseparable. In his autobiography, *Present Indicative,* he says: "The theatre had led us far in precocity and we discussed life and death and sex and religion with sublime sophistication. We also dressed in each other's clothes and paraded the West End, rode for miles on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway without tickets, evading station-masters, ticket-collectors and frequently even policemen. . . . We extracted, with the aid of bent hair-pins and latchkeys, packets of 'Snake Charmer' cigarettes from slot-machines and smoked them publicly with outward flamboyance and inward nausea. . . . We even had baths together for the simple reason that we didn't wish to waste a moment's companionship and because it seemed affected to stop short in the middle of some vital discussion for such a paltry reason as conventional modesty."

It was Miss Wynne who started him writing songs and short stories—"beastly little whimsies" as he now calls them.

Noel Coward was on holiday in Cornwall with an artist friend when the Great War was declared. He returned to London immediately,

meeting Hugh Walpole on the train. The eminent author stood him a lunch and tipped him half-a-crowji. After a Christmas engagement in *Peter Pan* he developed an unpleasant cough which proved to be of tubercular origin, and he was unable to work for a whole year. Part of the time was spent at the Pinewood Sanatorium, Wokingham, and he soon became quite fit again.

He had now become too old for children's parts and his voice had broken, so when he returned to town for Christmas in 1915, he played the part of "The Slacker" in *Where the Rainbow Ends.*

His first appearance in a film was in 1916, when he was taken on as a "super" in a D. W. Griffiths production *Hearts of the World.* He received £l a day for trundling a wheelbarrow up and down a village street with Lilian Gish. Shortly after this he began his long friendship with Bobbie Andrews and Ivor Novello, whom he had met during an engagement in Manchester.

In January 1918 he was examined for the Army by a medical board, but was rejected for ordinary service and eventually called up for duty in a Labour battalion with a dingy crowd of old men "in various stages of physical and mental decay". Fortunately, a friend at the War Office had him transferred to the Artists' Rifles OTC, but his health broke down during training, and after several weeks in hospital he was put on "light duties". Shortly afterwards he was discharged as physically unfit for service, and he returned to London "in a state of indescribable happiness".

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During the first couple of years after the war, engagements were not at all plentiful, and Noel Coward started writing plays of his own. One of his early efforts, *The Last Trick,* brought an offer of five hundred dollars for a year's option from Al Woods of New York. He accepted it and almost immediately received a further offer of fifteen hundred dollars for an outright purchase of it.

Another early success was *VU Leave it to You,* written at the suggestion of Gilbert Miller, and first produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, with Coward himself in the cast. It went extremely well, and at the end of the first night's performance the audience cheered him and demanded a speech. It was his first success as an author-actor. Mrs. Charles Hawtrey and Mrs. Gilbert Miller went to Manchester to see it, but despite the enthusiastic audiences, told him that the play could not be staged in London. Undismayed, he brought it to town, and although it did not run for any great length of time it

earned the praise of most or the critics, who said that a new playwright had been discovered.

He went to America in May 1921 accompanied by Jeffery Holmesdale, with "a bundle of manuscripts, a one-way ticket, and only seventeen pounds to spare". In *Present Indicative* he says: "The first week in New York was great fun until the novelty had evaporated slightly and my spare cash had evaporated entirely. We did everything we should have done. We went up the Woolworth Building. We gaped appropriately at the majesty of the Pennsylvania and Grand Central stations. We battled our way along Wall Street during the rush hour. We went to Coney Island on a Sunday night, and were jolted and rattled and bumped at a terrific speed through pitch-black tunnels, over canvas mountains, disembarking, green in the face, to consume 'hot dogs' and non-alcoholic beer. We learnt to distinguish between 'expresses' and 'locals' in the Subway. We went to Harlem, and drifted from cabaret to cabaret, jigging to alien rhythms, and' listening to strange wailings and screechings, until our feet ached, our ears buzzed, and our eyes blinked, in the cool dawn."

He sold a little book of burlesques, *A Withered Nosegay,* to Boni and Liveright, but soon became despondent at the lack of sympathy shown to him. Just as he had reached the end of his resources and was feeling very depressed, the editor of the *Metropolitan Magazine* offered him five hundred dollars to turn *I'll Leave it to You* into a short story for his magazine. He obliged, and then earned another five hundred for doing the same with *The Young Idea.*

On his return journey in October he met Dr. Marie Stopes on board the S.S. *Cedric.* Back in London he found himself "in the awkward situation of being too well known to be able to accept little jobs, and not well known enough to be able to command big ones". However, in about six months Robert Courtneidge arranged to give *The Young Idea* a six weeks' trial run in the provinces, and of course Noel Coward insisted upon playing "Sholto" himself. It opened at Bristol and did quite well. In 1923 it was put on at the Savoy Theatre, but although the press notices were full of praise, it ran for only eight weeks.

By that time he had met Andre Chariot, and had planned *London Calling* with him. He had been booked to play the leading juvenile part himself at £40 a week. It was a great sucess, and ran for almost a year, despite many changes in the original cast. Moreover, it gave Mm the satisfaction of hearing his own music being played in the

London restaurants, and the delight of seeing ins own name in electric lights outside a theatre for the first time.

In this happy frame of mind he went again to New York, staying this time at the Ritz, pleasantly contemplating the change in circumstances since his last visit to that city. When the bill was presented to him at the end of the firstweek he moved hastily into a friend's flat.

On his return he was invited to a party where he met the Prince of Wales, who sent him into a frenzy by asking him to play a tune he couldn't remember. He then went down to his cottage at Dockenficld, nursed a wretched cold, and wrote *Hay Fever,* which he completed in about throe days. After the manuscript had been typed he read it through but was not impressed by it, and after two friends had agreed that it was too light, and lacking in plot and action, he put it aside and wrote *Easy Virtue.*

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During a visit to Dcauvillc, Sir James Dunn offered him a contract in which he would have received £1,200 a year for a 25 % share oi* whatever money he earned during the ensuing five years, but he refused il, even though he had received no offers to produce *The Vortex, Hay Fever* or *Fallen Angels.*

The Vortex was accepted shortly afterwards by Norman Macderinott for production at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstcad. Just as everything was settled, Coward was told that the play would have to be abandoned because there was insufficient money to carry it through. Michael Arlen came to the rescue with a cheque for £200, and then another catastrophe occurred: the leading lady "walked out on him" during the rehearsals. This time Lilian Braithwaite saved him by offering to take over the part. "The dress rehearsal staunchly upheld theatrical tradition by being gloomy and depressing to the point of suicide. The acting was nervous and unbalanced. The dresses looked awful, and the lighting was sharply unbecoming. The theatre cat made a mess in the middle of the stage, which everybody said was lucky, but which, to me, seemed to be nothing so much as a sound criticism of the entire performance." Then the Lord Chamberlain refused to give a licence for the play because its theme was unpleasant, and Noel Coward had to visit him personally to convince him that the play was "little more than a moral tract". Everybody was in a state of nervous anxiety on the opening night, but it was a tremendous success, and once again he was called upon to make the author's speech at the end. It played to packed houses during its

short run at Hampstead and then Alban Limpus and Charles Kenyon made an offer to put it on at the Royalty Theatre.

That was in 1924, the year in which Noel Coward became famous. The Press sought him everywhere; photographers and interviewers badgered him; his turtle-necked jerseys became the rage among the more sophisticated; and he was able to indulge in a "long suppressed desire for silk shirts, pyjamas and underclothes".

I must record here that success never went to Noel Coward's head. He remained, modest, unaffected and considerate to everybody—even to some of the more tiresome people who flock round celebrities. A retired Brigadier-General wrote him an indignant letter complaining of the publication of a photograph showing him in bed wearing a Chinese dressing gown—but nobody takes any notice of Blimpism.

Next, he wrote a revue for C. B. Cochran entitled *On with the Dance,* which was given an ovation in Manchester before it was brought to the London Pavilion; and then *Fallen Angels* was produced, to the horror of the critics, who described it as "disgusting, vile and obscene"—with the result that thousands flocked to see it. It ran for several months, and gave him the new experience of receiving abusive anonymous letters from all parts of the country "frequently embellished with pornographic drawings".

At* this time, *Fallen Angels, On with the Dance and The Vortex* were all running simultaneously in London, and people began to speak of him as the second Somerset Maugham. He brought out *Hay Fever* again, and it was immediately produced at the Ambassadors Theatre. The critics wrote an assortment of unenthusiastic notices, but the play ran for over a year.

During his third visit to New York he arranged with Charles Dillingham and Abe Erlanger for the production of *The Vortex,* but Erlanger insisted upon a revision of the last act so that it would not offend the American respect for mother-love. He flatly refused, and the play was taken over by Sam Harris and Irving Berlin. On the first night when he made his entry, the audience gave him a terrific burst of applause that almost staggered him. In his autobiography he says: "Never before or since in all my experience have I received such a direct personal stimulus from an audience." The Press rhapsodized over it, and speculators bought up all the tickets and sold them outside the theatre for as much as twenty-five dollars a pair!

It was during this visit that Mr. Jack Wilson, then a stockbroker, became Coward's personal manager.

After two more successes. *Easy Virtue* and *The Queen was in the*

Parlour, his first serious play *The Rat Trap* was produced at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead, but failed.

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Noel Coward bought an old farm at Aldington which upon examination by a surveyor was found to be full of fine seventeenth century oak, and he embarked upon a bold plan of restoration which transformed it into a charming residence.

Home Chat and *Sirocco* were both 'flops", in fact, in his autobiography he says of the latter that it was "probably the bloodiest failure in the history of the English theatre". The disgusting display of ill-manners on the part of many people in the audience suggested that personal enemies had arranged a demonstration. "Without once looking at the audience I went along the frightened line of the company to the centre, shook hands with Ivor (Npvello), kissed Bunny Doble's hand, presenting my behind to the public as I did so, and walked off again." People even spat at him as he left the stage door.

Spiteful journalists pounced upon this catastrophe with glee, telling their readers that after all, Coward's success with *The Vortex* was but "a flash in the pan", and that he was now "done for". St. Jojin Ervine and Edgar Wallace were the exceptions, and not only defended the play, but warned the other critics that their abuse was "not only unsporting, but distinctly premature".

Noel Coward stayed in London for a week and then went to Paris to get over it. He derived a little consolation from the thought that Bernard Shaw had been treated in very much the same manner.

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Then followed his revue *This Year of Grace,* which after a trial in Manchester went on at the London Pavilion and was an immediate success; whereupon the critics changed their tune. In the same year, 1928, he started writing his famous musical show *Bitter Sweet,* It was given a three weeks' trial run at Manchester in the spring of the following year and created a furore. Every seat for the entire three weeks was sold in a day. When it came to London at His Majesty's it was a definite success, but the audience lacked the high spirited enthusiasm of the Mancunians. In America it did even better, and a special cordon of police had to be called out to control the crowds and traffic in the vicinity of the theatre. In *Present Indicative* Noel Coward says that floodlighting was used to illuminate the gratified

audience as they came into the theatre, flashlight photographs were taken of every celebrity entering the foyer, and seats on the orchestra floor were sold by speculators for two-hundred-and-fifty dollars a pair. His box was stacked with flowers, caviare and champagne.

This great success enabled him to start travelling to see the world. He visited Hollywood, Honolulu, Tokio, Peking, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Ceylon in his tour to the Far East, and during the journey wrote *Private Lives,* which was put on at the Phoenix Theatre in 1930. He played in it for a three months' run with Gertrude Lawrence, Adrianne Allen and Lawrence Olivier, and then took it to New York, where it was an outstanding success. While he was there he started planning *Cavalcade.* For this tremendous production many structural alterations had to be carried out at the Drury Lane Theatre.

At its first night an appalling hitch occurred. In one of the changes of scenery the downstage hydraulic lift stuck, and Noel Coward was tolcl that it would take two hours to make it operate. He sat in his box watching the orchestra trying to fill in the breach, and just as he had decided that the entire show would have to be abandoned, the blue light on the conductor's desk flashed, the curtain rose, and the show went on! It was an enormous success and he was overwhelmed with congratulations. It disturbed him to find that many people regarded it as a patriotic appeal, and rather than stay in this country to "cash-in on the tin-pot glory" he decided to visit South America.

On the night before he sailed, the King and Queen and the entire Royal Family went to see *Cavalcade.* After the second act Noel Coward and C. B. Cochran were received in the ante-room behind the Royal Box. "Six Royal bows, one after the other, were rather agitating, but we were kindly and graciously put at our ease. I repressed a nervous desire to describe to Their Majesties the extreme squalor of that very ante-room in the early hours of the morning during our first lighting rehearsal, when Gladys and I had used it as a sort of combined rest-room and snack-bar. My mind's eye could still see curling ham-sandwiches in greasy paper—crumbling Banbury cakes and bottles of gin and tonic littering that smooth correct table. I think Their Majesties were pleased with the play, and the Prince of Wales asked me several searching questions, but I hope I acquitted myself favourably; at all events, it was a proud moment for me, and I set it gratefully in my memory."

At the final curtain there were such terrific bursts of cheering that Coward was afraid the chandeliers would fall into the stalls. "It was

a tremendous night for me; a gratifying theatrical flourish to my twenty-one years of theatre."

Since that memorable occasion Noel Coward has travelled extensively and has had the following productions staged: *Words and Music* (a revue produced at the Adelphi Theatre in 1932), *Design for Living* (New York, 1933), *Conversation Piece* (London, 1934), *Point Valaine* (New York, 1935), *To-night at* 8.30 (London, 1936), *Operette* (London, 1938), *Blithe Spirit* (London, 1941), *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed* (London, 1942).

lie had a volume of short stones, *To Step Aside,* published early in 1939.

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At the outbreak of the present war, Noel Coward went to Paris to work in an official capacity, but following the fall of France he went to America at the request of H.M. Government. At the invitation of the Australian Government he went to Australia and New Zealand, touring those Dominions, making many speeches and broadcasts, entertaining in camps and hospitals and giving concerts in aid of the Red Cross and other charities. He returned to this country in 1941 having travelled over 40,000 miles, chiefly by aeroplane. His visits to our troops in the Middle East are recorded in his *Middle East Diary* (1944).

Within a few months he began work on his famous film of the Royal Navy, *In Which We Serve,* and as soon as it was released, he began a long tour of England, Scotland and Wales with his three new plays, *Present Laughter, This Happy Breed* and *Blithe Spirit,* at the end of which the first two were presented for a limited season at the Haymarket Theatre, London. *Blithe Spirit* has enjoyed an exceptionally long run in town, and as I write it is still being performed.

What of the future? Noel Coward is barely forty-four years of age and yet has achieved outstanding success both as an actor and a playwright. Will success spoil him? I think the answer is definitely "No". Some people are afraid he will get "serious", but after seeing *Blithe Spirit* I don't think we need worry very much about that. He is so irresistible when he writes in a frivolous mood that I don't think his friends will allow him to "go heavy". Who knows what he has in store for us?

A. J. CRONIN

A SURPRISING number of doctors have become authors. In this book alone you will find four: A. J. Cronin, Warwick Deeping, Somerset Maugham and Francis Brett Young, and it does not require much effort to think of several others—Helen Ashton, Conan Doyle, Georges Duhamel and de Vere Stacpoole, for instance. When you come to my sketch of Somerset Maugham you will find what I believe to be the explanation of this interesting fact, but Dr. Cronin admits that personally he was tempted into literature by rosy dreams of a "quiet haven of authorship" which contrasted so sharply with the hard realities of a weary general practitioner's life. He also admits now that the "haven of authorship" is not quite such a quiet place as one imagines when one settles in it for life!

Archibald Joseph Cronin was born at Cardross, Scotland, in 1896, the only child of Patrick and Jessie (Montgomery) Cronin. He loved English literature at school, and at Dumbarton Academy distinguished himself in Classics, winning several medals and other awards for essays. His obvious talent for writing was not encouraged at home; in fact it was generally regarded as a slight tendency towards eccentricity and even insanity, so when he left school and had to consider the question of a career, his parents made it quite plain that they were going to stand no nonsense about literary inclinations, and gave him the inevitable Scottish choice of medicine or Holy Orders. He chose the former as being the lesser of the two evils, and went to Olasgow University as a medical student, in due course qualifying as a doctor (Ch.B., M.B. with honours and ultimately M.D. with honours). During the years 1916-1918 he served as a surgeon-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

After a tour to India as a ship's surgeon in 1919, he was appointed Physician-in-charge of the Out-patients Department at Bellahouston Ministry of Pensions Hospital, but later moved to the position of Medical Superintendent of Lightburn Isolation Hospital.

He married a lady doctor, Agnes Mary Gibson, in 1921 and then started as a general practitioner. For the first few years he worked in depressing little Welsh mining towns, and we may be fairly certain that the experiences he relates in *The Citadel* are to a great extent autobiographical. .He became extremely interested in the various

diseases (chiefly of the lungs) to which miners are most susceptible and did a great deal of private research. After taking two higher medical degrees he was appointed in 1924 to an official position in the Ministry of Mines, and had to tour the coalfields of Great Britain to make a comprehensive study of the conditions that produce pulmonary disabilities. This research brought him into close contact with a large number of ailing miners, and in the course of his investigations he descended into over five hundred mines. His *Report on Medical Regulations in British Collieries* was published by His Majesty's Stationery Office.

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When he finished his official duties, Dr. Cronin took a practice in London and soon became one of the more prominent of the fashionable doctors in the West End. But a few years later he had to leave his work for six months to recover from a serious attack of gastric ulcers. He took accommodation at a farm near Inveraray, overlooking Lo^h Fyne, and suddenly realized that he now had a wonderful opportunity to fulfil his life's ambition to write a novel. Remembering that spelling had never been his strong point, he bought a dictionary and shut himself in a little upstairs room with a pile of exercise books.

It was not at all easy to make a start on the book. Whenever he settled down to work he was tempted to go fishing, to boat on the loch or to drive his car in the Highlands. He also had an attack of diffidence; a depressing frame of mind which frequently settles on writers when they pen (or type) the first few lines of a book. However, he told himself bluntly that unless he could write a saleable novel in. six months he would be obliged to return to the monotonous life of writing innumerable prescriptions for tiresome people who had very little wrong with them. That settled it. He struggled for days with the opening chapters, and then somehow *Hatter's Castle* seemed to develop itself. There were, of course, occasions when he was tempted to give up; but the thought that he would probably never have another opportunity to escape from medicine spurred him on, and in three months he completed a tremendous manuscript of over 250,000 words! I can assure you that he must have written at a truly amazing speed, because there are many established writers who would consider that to be a year's work at least. I might also add that the last 50,000 words of *Hatter's Castle* were written in an incredible spurt that lasted for nine days!

Dr. Cronin sent his typescript off to a publisher feeling very doubtful about it, and warned his family that they were not to embarrass him with condolences when it was returned. It was not only accepted but soon after its publication in 1931 it was chosen by the Book Society. Before long its success was so great that it had to be translated into six other languages, and a dramatized edition was demanded.

As most people know, *Hatter's Castle* tells of a hatter named James* Brodie, who lived in the small Scottish town of Levenford. He is an absurdly ambitious man who believes that he is of noble descent, and tries to live accordingly. His "Castle", typical of his folly, was inspired by a house that actually existed in Levenford.

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Cronin's next novel, *Three Loves,* was not quite as successful. He wrote this story of a Scottish lady (whose three loves were her husband, son and God) when he was staying at his house on the Sussex Downs, and he thinks that probably the softer, gentler countryside around him at that time influenced him so that he wrote a more restrained type of book.

His third novel, *Grand Canary* (1983), which tells of a falsely accused London doctor who tries to forget his worries by going on a cruise to the Canary Islands, was the result of Cronin's own visit to Las Palmas, Teneriffe and Orotava, where he found everything "perfectly lovely and unspoiled".

His next great success was *The Stars Look Down,* which was published in 1935. This famous story of thirty years in a North of England Kuning village exposed the appalling conditions under which the men worked and lived, and described very vividly a colliery disaster. It was made into a magnificent film by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Two years later (1937) Cronin's best-seller, *The Citadel,* caused another sensation. This book has also become so well known as a film that I need scarcely add that it is the story of a young Scottish doctor who begins his career as an assistant to an aged general practitioner in a Welsh mining village, and who later succeeds in establishing a fashionable practice in London, where he finds a deplorable lack of honesty and integrity among the other physicians and surgeons, and learns the methods of some of the worst types of fee-snatching specialists.

In 1940 Dr. Cronin wrote a play, *Jupiter Laughs,* in which a young scientist falls in love with a lady missionary, and after her death goes

to China to continue her work. It was produced both in London and in New York, but was not a success.

The following year, however, saw the publication of *The Keys of the Kingdom,* a fine story of a Catholic priest who goes as a missionary to China. Cronin says he got the idea for this book over ten years ago when he was in Rome during a festival commemorating a great saint. It occurred to him that a good story could be made about the life of one of these unknown, obscure saints we meet occasionally in every-day life. I must add, by the way, that he wrote *The Keys of the King-<lom* in an attic when he was suffering from a prolonged attack of acute indigestion!

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A. J. Cronin is tall and broad. He has a frank, round, pleasant face and looks about ten years younger than he really is. He has three sons, Vincent, Robert (Patrick), and Andrew. His wife helps him a great deal in his work; one of her principal tasks being the perusal of his manuscripts for spelling mistakes 1

Cronin is fond of most outdoor sports; he used to play football in his younger days, but now confines himself to golf and fishing—preferably trout-fishing. He is very keen on the theatre and loves going to first nights and forming his own opinion about plays. His favourite authors are Robert Louis Stevenson, Scott, Conrad, Balzac, Maupassant, Flaubert, Arnold Bennett, Sinclair Lewis and Somerset Maugham.

When they were living in London, the Cronins had a pleasant house in Kensington. Now, with the exception of their eldest son who is here in the Rifle Brigade, the family is in America, where Dr. Cronin is engaged in work for the Office of War Information. He writes to me from Greenwich, Connecticut, saying that he has just been given an honorary degree of D.Litt. by one of the American universities.

WARWICK DEEPING

LIKE Francis Brett Young, Warwick Deeping was not only the son of a country doctor, but qualified in medicine himself before he became established as an author. He was born at Southend, Essex, in 1877, and was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School. He admits quite frankly that he was idle at school because the curriculum bored him, and congratulates himself upon having "escaped some of the repressions and futilities of a merely academic education". However, with the aid of a private tutor he assimilated enough of the despised academic knowledge to take him to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied science and medicine, lie took his M.B. in 1902, and proceeded to the Middlesex Hospital to obtain the necessary practical experience to qualify him as a doctor. He then worked as a general practitioner in the country for about a year.

So many of our greater authors began to blossom as juvenile poets and as editors of school magazines while still in their 'teens, that I was a little surprised to learn that Warwick Deeping had no literary inclinations whatever when he was a boy, and it was not until he was a student of twenty that he started to write a few poems. Most ol them, he tells me, were very bad poetry, but they kindled in him an enthusiasm for writing as a form of self-expression, and he soon had two or three.novels to his credit. He became "infected with the medievalism of the romantic school" and produced a scries of historical novels,about which he is now very modest. He considers that they were not particularly good because at that time he was far too absorbed in himself and in his own career. Commercially, at any rate, they were successful, being quite entertaining stories, and they enabled him to abandon his medical practice and to devote himself entirely to his writing.

It was at about this time that he married Miss Maude Phyllis Merrill. "We young things," he told me, "had our struggles and our worries, but we managed to find life a great adventure". For a while they lived on a farm in Sussex, but later they were able to build themselves a house of their own design. The land surrounding it was a great temptation to Mr. Deeping, and he set about laying it out as a garden, with tremendous enthusiasm. The degree of his success may

be judged by the fact that he has quite a reputation locally as a designer of gardens.

Then the Great War changed everything for them. Young doctors were urgently required to go overseas with the troops, and early in 1915 Mr. Deeping was commissioned in the RAMC. During the next three years he served on the Gallipoli Peninsula, in Egypt, France and Belgium. His experiences on the battlefields and in the field hospitals made a tremendous impression upon him. "The war as a great human experience," he told me, "launched me on deeper seas. One realized that a nice culture was less important than courage and character. One set out to see life and its realities, its pathos and heroism, and I have managed to find it more splendid than sordid. A negative cynicism seems to me to be a form of cowardice."

The war had a profound effect upon his work; it gave him a very real desire to understand humanity more fully, and as a result his post-war novels were incomparably deeper in perception and infinitely more mature. Actually, much of the material in them was written before he returned to this country, as he began to write again in odd moments during the very small amount of time he had off duty, frequently making notes in dug-outs and huts in the devastation of "No man's land".

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When he returned to civilian life he set to work immediately and wrote some of the best novels of his career, all of which were most successful. *Sorrell and Son* was a direct product of his war experiences, although it did not appear until 1925. His output has been remarkable in quantity as well as in quality, as the following list of his books will show:

Second Youth (1019), *The Prophetic Marriage* (1920), *Lantern Lane* (1021), *Orchards* (1922), *The Secret Sanctuary* (1923), *Apples of Gold* (1923), *Three Rooms* (1924), *Suvla John* (1924), *Sorrell and Son* (1925), *Doomsday* (1927), *Kitty* (1928), *Old Pybus* (1928), *Ropers' Row* (1929), *Exiles* (1930), *The Road* (1931), *Old Wine and Neiv* (1932), *Smith* (1932), *Two Black Sheep* <1933), *Seven Men Came Back* (1934), *The Man on the White Horse* (1934), *Sackcloth into Silk* (1985), *No Hero—This* (1936), *Blind Man's Year* (1937), *The Woman at the Door* (1937), *The Malice of Men* (1938), *Fantasia* (1939), *Shabby Summer* (1939), *The Man who went back* (1940), *The Dark House* (1941), *Corn in Egypt* (1941), / *live again* (1942), *Slade* (1943), *Mr. Gurney and Mr. Slade* (1944).

Most of the characters in these novels have been suggested to him irom time to time by real people with whom he has come into con-

tact. He has seen the originals of *Sorrell, Old Pybus* and *Christopher Hazzard.*

Mr. and Mrs. Deeping live a quiet life in their beautiful house at Weybridge, Surrey, where Mrs. Siddons spent her childhood. "I have had some success and a good deal pf happiness," he told me recently. "I can charge much of it to my parents and especially to my wife, who has been the sort of comrade a man dreams of and yet so rarely finds."

Some people believe that the average author gets up at noon, toys with a little *pdte de foie gras* for breakfast, writes for an hour or so, and then spends the rest of the day at a series of cocktail parties. For their special benefit, I will add that Warwick Deeping starts work at seven o'clock in the morning, and goes to bed at nine-thirty every evening.

He likes the open air and travelling, flowers and trees—and the people who do the work of the world without remembering to be self-consciously clever. "To enjoy the perfume of life," he says, "one has to cultivate a certain simplicity."

Sir Newman Flower, of Messrs. Casscll & Co., Ltd., tells me that before the war Mr. Deeping's books were very popular in Germany and Austria. *Sorrell and Son,* his masterpiece, still sells very well when copies are available, and there is a constant demand for all of the sixty novels he has written.

GILBERT FRANKAU

IF the name were not for some reason associated with short stocky people, I should be inclined to call Gilbert Frankau the John Bull of contemporary British novelists. He has always been rather an adventurous, obdurate man who has made many mistakes (and has admitted them) but who has also stuck to his guns unflinchingly when more powerful people have opposed him. He has usually told them very distinctly to go to hell.

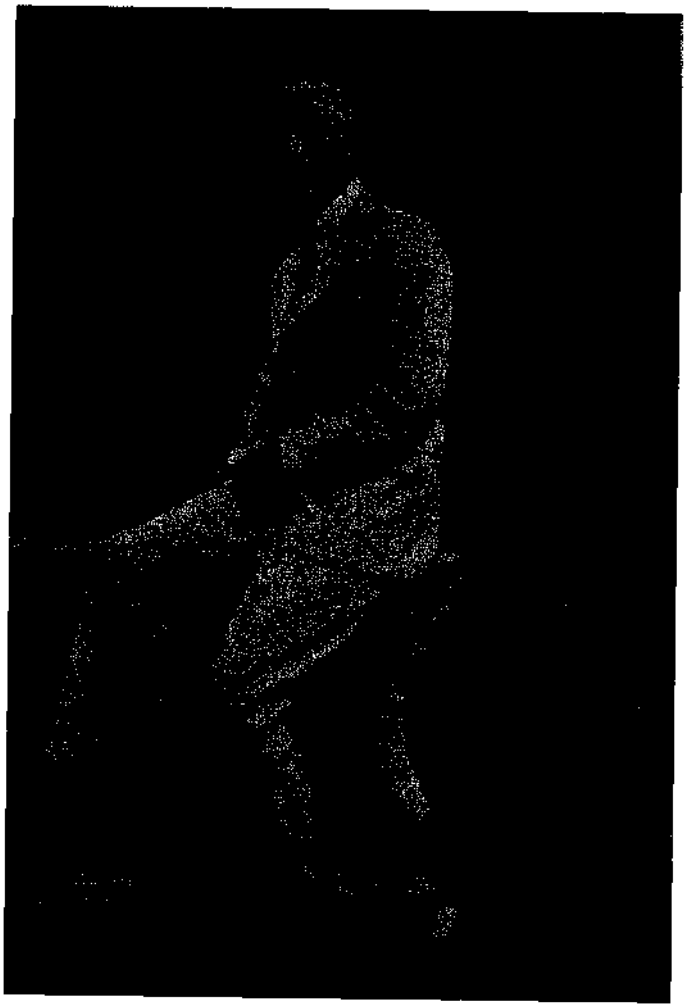
He was born in London on April 21, 1884. His father was a partner in the firm of J. Frankau & Co., cigar merchants; his mother was "Frank Dan by" the novelist, and co-founder with the late J. T. Grein of the Independent Theatre. Before I go any further I suppose I had better add for those who don't know, that Ronald Frankau, the well-known variety star, is Gilbert's brother.

Gilbert Frankau went to "Morning Classes for the Sons of Gentlemen" near Port man Square, and then to St. Michael's Preparatory School, Westgate-on-Sea. Chiefly for his own satisfaction he won iirst a scholarship to Harrow, and then one to Eton. He had to refuse both because his father, who had already made up his mind to send him to Eton, preferred to pay his fees in the ordinary manner.

One of his first experiences at Eton was a "pi-jaw" delivered in Upper School by the Headmaster, Edmond Warre, warning the boys against homosexual practices. In *Self-Portrait,* his brilliant autobiography, Gilbert Frankau says: "It would be useless to pretend that the "filthy thing' against which Edmond Warre fulminated was non-existent at Eton. As long as human nature remains human nature a system which educates lusty young fellows of eighteen and nineteen under the same roof as children of twelve, thirteen and fourteen, forbidding those lusty young fellows, at the identical pain of instant dismissal, the physical consolation of the opposite sex—so long shall we risk our children being contaminated." But I must add that further in the same book he declares, "There were, as I have admitted, practisers of amatory unorthodoxy in the Eton of my youth. But personally I never came into contact with one; though hearsay—it was never more than hearsay—toi ched a name or two; and on one occasion Barry and I, taking hearsay for granted, indulged in running kicks at the possibly maligned pants." He also adds that

Photograph by Elliott & Fry Ltd.

Gilbert Frankau



very few boys were expelled for this or other reasons during his time. Snobbery, too, was non-existent, and as far as his house was concerned, bullying was unknown.

In the ordinary course of events he rarely came into contact with "the Head". On one occasion, however, Warre was present in a book-shop, dressed in flannel trousers, blue blazer and a mufller, and was not recognized when he rebuked Gilbert Frankau and his friends for ragging the assistant.

"Don't you know who / am?" he thundered.

"No, I don't," one of the boys piped, "but you look like a bargee."

Gilbert Frankau was a member of the Eton College Royal Volunteers, and still recalls how on field days they enjoyed orgies of smoking, and put acorns into their rifles before loading with blank cartridges. He cannot understand why there were no casualties.

On the whole, he enjoyed his schooldays, though he resented the discipline. He started an unofficial school paper called the *X Magazine* with a capital of £l 3s. 4d. Most of his expenses were met by obtaining advertisements from the local tradesmen who served the Eton boys, and he admits in his autobiography, "One seems to remember that the line between canvassing and blackmail was rather thin." After a short and lively existence it was suppressed by the Headmaster.

Shortly afterwards he published a volume of satirical verse, *Eton Echoes,* dedicated thus:

"To the Lord High Executioner beneath whose unswerving axe fell the martyred *X Magazine* in the first flush of youth this little volume is dedicated as a peace-offering by its author, the quondam editor of that ill-fated periodical."

Before I go on I must say here that because a character in *One of Us* was expelled from Eton for a love affair, many people presume that Gilbert Frankau suffered a similar fate. That is quite untrue.

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He did not wish to go to Oxford, preferring to enter his father's business. He spent a year in Germany to perfect his knowledge of the language and to learn more about the cigar trade, and at the age of twenty-one became managing director of J. Frankau & Co.

He married Miss Dorothea Drununond-Black at St. Margaret's, Westminster, in December 1905, and as he had to go to Havana on business, they went together, making it their honeymoon. A week was spent in Paris *en route* where one of Frankau's friends dropped, a brick by saying, "So you've brought another one this time!"

In *Self-Portrait* he mentions an hotel they patronized in Miami which possessed no elevator. The receptionist explained that the lift had been ordered, but for the past six months had been delayed on the railroad, and that the proprietor of the other hotel in the town happened to be one of the big men on that railroad board. . . .

Soon after the birth of their first daughter, Ursula, Mr. Frankau went to Italy, and if he will forgive me for pulling yet another plum out of his autobiographical pudding, I would like to quote a remark made by his aunt after he had dragged her round a picture gallery:

" 'I don't want to be blasphemous,' she panted, sinking heavily into an armchair at the Grand Hotel, Rome. 'But if I have to look at many more sacred pictures I shall begin to wish that the Madonna had never had that child.' "

Their second daughter, Pamela (now a well-known novelist), was born on January 3, 1908. For many years she was officially non-existent because Mr. Frankau forgot to register her birth!

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A few years before the Great War the cigar business began to decline and the Frankaus had to move into a small suburban house at Harrow. Here he wrote his first book, *One of Us,* a novel in verse. About twenty publishers rejected it, and it was not until his mother secretly guaranteed £50 against possible loss on its publication that Chatto & Windus decided to take a chance on it. It was Frank Swinnerton, their principal reader, who recommended it for publication, by the way.

In 1912 Gilbert Frankau went on a long business tour to Australia, South America and the West Indies, and started his first prose novel, *The Woman of the Horizon,* on the way. All the good he did for his firm was promptly undone when war broke out, and the business eventually had to be sold.

He was first commissioned in the 9th East Surrey Regiment in 1914, but transferred to the Royal Field Artillery in 1915, proceeding overseas as Adjutant to the 107th Brigade. He tells us in *Self-Portrait* that his fourteen months at the front taught him that the world's finest gentleman is "poor bloody Tommy". He also recalls how an idiot girl in Bailleul had been raped at the age of sixteen in the open street by more than a dozen drunken Hun infantrymen *while their officers looked on.* This, he declares emphatically, could never have taken place in the British army.

Frankau fought at Loos, Ypres and on the Somme, and sustained

severe shell-shock. In October 1916 he was promoted to the rank of Staff Captain for special duty in Italy, where his chief job was to convince the Italian people "that we had several men fighting in France''. While he was there he met Kipling, for whose work he has a great admiration. When he returned to this country he asked to be sent back to France to command a battery in action, but shell shock was undermining his health and in February 1918 he was invalided out of the Army with the rank of Captain.

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For the next year or two he was muddled about by a dozen shell-shock specialists, each of whom advised him differently on the mode of life he should adopt, so he ignored them all and devoted himself to the writing of his famous best-seller, *Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant,* which he describes as "a romance of love, war and business".

In the early 'twenties he met Noel Coward, who was then on the threshold of his theatrical career, and told him, "If you only persevere and don't fool about so much, you might make quite a name for yourself." Another fact to be recorded at this juncture is the dissolution of his first marriage. He married his second wife, Aimde de Burgh, in the spring of 1922.

At one time there was a man who used to impersonate Gilbert Frankau, autographing copies of his books and making the acquaintance of women "with no small amatory success". You can imagine how pleased Mr. Frankau was when he received a letter which ran to eight pages of "Swinburnian rhapsody, with a postscript hinting at blackmail." Two or three more letters of this type followed from highly sentimental ladies who put a price on silence.

During the years between the two world wars, Gilbert Frankau made unceasing efforts to make this country understand the danger of Germany's ambitions. He vigorously opposed disarmament and repeatedly emphasized the futility of relying upon the League of Nations to guarantee our security. But when Hitler let hell loose, Mr. Frankau was one of the few who did *not* go about saying, "I told you so."

He resigned from the PEN Club when John Galsworthy invited •Gerhart Hauptmann and "a certain Frenchman" to one of its early -dinners. In his *Self-Portrait* he says, "I had sworn never to break bread with a Boche if I could help it—and have only done so on two subsequent occasions." When a German film company made him a .handsome offer for the film rights of one of his novels he told the

negotiator, "Tell your Hun friend that if he makes it double he can still go to hell."

Gilbert Frankau's novels became very popular in the nineteen-twenties and several have been made into films. His later books include: *Martin Make Believe* (1930), *Concerning Peter Jackson and Others* (1931), *Christopher Strong* (1932), *Wine, Women and Waiters* (1932), *Everywoman* (1933), *Secret Services* (1934), *Three Englishmen* (1935), *Farewell Romance* (1936), *Experiments in Crime* (1937), *More of Us* (a novel in verse; sequel to *One of Us),* 1937, *The Dangerous Years* (1937), *Royal Regiment* (1938), *Self-Portrait* (1939), *Winter of Discontent* (American title: *Air Ministry, Room* 28, 1941), *Escape to Yesterday* (1942), and *World Without End* (1943).

In 1926 he visited New York (see *My Unsentimental Journey* for full details) where among other things he "covered" the story of the hanging of a man called Gerald Chapman for the *New York Evening Journal.* Eleven years later the same paper asked him to write about the wedding of the Duke of Windsor to Mrs. Wallis Simpson, but he refused.

He describes New York as a "Cosmopolis", a "monstrous mechanical Frankenstein of a city, full of hective rather than active people, all crazy with the zest of life". He caused something of a flutter there by an outspoken speech against Communism: judge for yourself by this snatch of American conversation reported in *Self-Portrait:*

"He'd be better with his mother."

"But his mother's dead."

"Sure. And so he'll be if he don't get out of town."

Time has modified very considerably his attitude towards Communism. I might also add that his expenses on that trip across the water were somewhere in the region of 600 dollars a week!

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Mr. Frankau made a great stir in England when he became editor of an attractive new weekly paper called *Britannia* in 1928. It was one of Mr. William Harrison's new ventures. His salary and expenses were £10,000 a year; luxurious offices were taken on the top floor of Inveresk House; equipment was bought regardless of expense, and a highly-paid staff was engaged. The first number of this 100-page magazine appeared on September 28th. Nothing was spared to make it a great sucess; more than £10,000 was spent in advertising the first issue alone; and orders were secured for 200,000 copies. Yet it failed. . The first number contained fifty pages of advertising; the second less

than eleven pages; and the third only six! In his autobiography he says, "Experience, realizing the root cause of eventual failure, can perceive several of the contributory causes by merely glancing at that first copy. The cartoon—entirely of my own instigation—was in itself enough to alienate every fanatical Baldwinite. And my leader, passionately pleading for protection of industry, ends with a gibe at all parties: 'How long', it asks, 'can even the best balanced Empire sit on Three Rotten Stools?' "

Another cause was an unfortunate *double entendre* which somehow escaped the editorial blue pencil, and which upset thousands of readers and no small number of advertisers. Mr. Frankau quite candidly admits his own mistakes, but let me add here that even when a larger advertising revenue might have saved the ship he steadfastly refused the advertisements of patent medicines, and instead continued his policy of allowing the British Medical Association to contribute a page of hints on health and hygiene. It takes a brave man to make a stand against the patent medicine advertisers these days!

One by one the advertisers forsook him—although Charles Higham and George Hoyds stuck to him to the end—and finally, dissension on the board of directors led to a lawsuit with Mr. Frankau claiming (and winning) heavy damages. Soon after he left the paper it was amalgamated with *Eve,* and made into a monthly magazine.

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His next idea was to stand for Parliament, and he offered himself to the Conservative party as a candidate. He was told that a divorced man stood no chance whatever of being accepted by any constituency. His second wife divorced him in 1931, by the way, after he had obligingly provided the usual cooked evidence. He married his third, Susan Lorna Harris, in the following year.

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Mr. and Mrs. Frankau were in Hollywood during those fateful months that led up to the present war. Their friends begged them to stay in America when Hitler attacked Poland, but as war seemed inevitable, they returned to this country. Typically, Gilbert Frankau's first thought when he got home was to volunteer for active service. He was accepted in the Royal Air Force and commissioned as a Pilot Officer in an Intelligence Section, where he rose to the rank of Squadron Leader with his own subsection. He was invalided out of the

RAF in February 1941, and two months later his house in Basil Street was destroyed in an air raid. He took his wife down to Hove for a year or so, where he joined the Home Guard, but returned to London in October 1942, and took a flat in Mayfair.

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His latest book, *World Without End,* was published recently by Hutchinson's; an exciting story of the experiences of a soldier during the period between the two world wars. Mr. Frankau tells me he docs not intend to publish any more books until the war is over, because lie is now working upon a rather outspoken psychological novel which will have to wait until the lights go up again before it can be published.

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He responded to my request for his views on Reconstruction by inviting me to meet him at the Cavalry Club. So on a pleasant summer's evening this year I made my way along Piccadilly to that dignified establishment overlooking Green Park, and found him in the lounge. He gave me the only glass of port I've had recently that did not taste like sour vinegar sweetened with saccharine, and told me to fire away. The conversation went something like this:

MYSELF: What do you think of the proposed Federation of European States after the war?

G. F.: I think it's a lovely dream, but like the League of Nations, it won't work.

MYSELF; Then you think there will still have to be independent sovereign States?

G. F.: Yes, that can't be avoided. The war is producing intense nationalism; and I don't think that patriotism can suddenly be replaced by idealistic dreams. But there will have to be a great deal of friendly co-operation between the European nations when Reconstruction takes place.

MYSELF: DO you think that nationalism is a thing to be discouraged?

G. F.: No. The idea of abolishing nationalism is just left-hand rubbish.

MYSELF. How do you think that peace can be preserved?

G. F.: The future of Europe—of the world—lies in the hands of the big victorious nations. It will be up to us—Britain,

America, Russia and China to build a decent social order for everybody, and I believe in a doctrine of benevolent force to protect that order.

MYSELF: You are in favour of an international body to control the aspirations of the nations?

G. F.: Frankly, I don't think international control as it is visualized by the idealists at present would work at all. The Allied nations will have to do the controlling.

MYSELF: What do you think will be the result of the next General Election?

G. F.: I shouldn't be at all surprised to see a swing to the Right, though there may emerge a new Liberalism, which I think would be more in keeping with the general spirit of the people. The future of the world lies with the well-balanced minds, not with the extremists. We must get rid of emotion in politics; it is all very well in the arts, but in politics practical questions must be dealt with in a practical way. Heaven help us if we're left in the hands of the fanatical idealists; they haven't the slightest idea of the way to formulate a practical plan. We don't want "wish-dreamers", as I call them, nor do we want people with good intentions who are either too stupid or too deceitful to do anything about them. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

MYSELF: DO you think people are becoming interested in politics again?

G. F.: People are thinking very hard these days—particularly the middle classes. They won't be humbugged; and there is an intense dislike of any sort of regimentation. People are becoming more individualistic; they are reasoning for themselves, and are learning to scorn idiotic slogans and catch-phrases. Personally, I hate "patent medicine" politics.

MYSELF: Do you think we shall have to put up with much restriction after the war?

G. F.: People are putting up with regimentation at the present time because they appreciate the necessity for it, but as soon as the war is over compulsion and restriction will have to go. Hang it all, we're fighting this war for freedom, and we're not going to be dictated to by a bunch of civil servants—or social dreamers—when the dictators of Germany and Italy have been eliminated. We're damned well going to live our nw~ lives!

MYSELF: You think there's a danger of a bureaucratic dictatorship in this country after the war?

G. F.: Yes, a very real danger unless we nip it in the bud, though personally I don't think our fighting men would tolerate any interference with their liberties when they get back to civil life.

MYSELF: What about the nationalization of the railways? Are you in favour of it?

G. F.: No.

MYSELF: Nationalization of the banks, then?

G. F.: No, definitely not. Banking and other forms of commerce are better left as they are. There may have to be a certain amount of Governmental control of private enterprise if it tends to become a social menace in any way, but I'm opposed to Government enterprises because a Government can't adventure in the way that individuals or companies of individuals can.

MYSELF: You favour the encouragement of individual initiative then, in preference to any sort of communal trading schemes?

G. F.: Yes, every time.

MYSELF: What do you think of Communism now?

G. F.: Communism in Russia to-day is merely a system of State capitalism.

MYSELF: DO you think that Winston Churchill should stay in office after the war to direct Reconstruction?

G. F.: I have a tremendous admiration of Winston Churchill, but I hope he won't make the same mistake as Lloyd George. He's getting on, you know, and what I earnestly hope he will do is to retire and write a real history of the present war. He's a grand writer, and he alone knows all the secrets. He could produce a wonderful book; a book of tremendous importance and of inestimable value to historians of the future. If he docs this, we really can't expect more of him.

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MYSELF: What about the Church of England? Is it worth preserving?

G. F.: Well, . . . that's hardly my subject. 1 really don't know enough about it to pass a fair judgment. . . . I think you'd better let me off that question if you don't mind!

MYSELF: Are the Public Schools worth preserving then?

G. F.: Yes, most certainly, but I want to see them thrown open to

all classes of boys. There must be a far greater system of scholarships, so that the advantages of a public school education go to the boys with the best brains. Admission should be by open competition, regardless of the financial and social status of the parents.

MYSELF: What are your views on the proposed compulsory State Medical Service?

G. F.: I don't like that word compulsory! We must have a thoroughly efficient State Medical Service providing the best treatment for everybody, so that those who can't afford specialists' fees get precisely the same attention as those who can. This is just an instance where I want to see a compromise between "left" and "right". Let there be a free choice of ddctors and let those who prefer to pay for their treatment do so.

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MYSELF: Should the State subsidize cultural work?

G. F.: That all depends on what you mean by "cultural work".

MYSELF: Well, take for instance the publication of books of great cultural value whose sales are not likely to bring adequate remuneration either to the author or to the publisher. I am told that most first-class publishers produce quite a number of such books, and get nothing but the prestige.

G. F.: I see what you mean. I think the State might subsidize by means of grants, but then there would be that awful danger of State control again. . . .

MYSELF: Yes, but supposing we had a decent system whereby a reputable board of impartial judges could be empowered to make an award?

G. F.: Yes, but I can't help feeling there may still be a danger of influence or control.

MYSELF: But if such a board made the award after publication, or after the manuscript had been accepted by the publisher, and if no conditions of revision or alteration were imposed. . .

G. F.: Yes, I think we could do with something on those lines. The CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) is doing good work and might well be extended, too. I am expecting a big drive for the encouragement of arts after the war.

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MYSELF: Do you approve of the Beveridge plan?

G. F.: Yes. I think it is a sound part of a much biggei scheme for social improvement. What annoys me is the way the newspapers have interpreted it; turning it into a sort of glorified dole-system. This is quite wrong. Bevcridge's primary assumption is the elimination of mass unemployment, and that can only be done by a vast scheme to provide work for everybody instead of paying them to be idle.

MYSELF: YOU don't think the Beveridge plan will kill individual initiative?

G. F.: No. The Government must have the sense to see that initiative must be encouraged in every possible way.

MYSELF: DO you favour family allowances?

G. F.: Yes. The provision in the Beveridge plan is quite sound, though personally I am inclined to favour a much higher rebate on the income tax; say £100 allowance for each child. I also think the cost of education should be substantially reduced.

MYSELF: What are your reactions to this scare about the falling birthrate. Do you think there is any case for alarm?

G. F.: Scarcely for alarm, but I am very concerned about it, chiefly because so many of the better brains are not reproducing.

MYSELF: Don't you think that the housing problem is the cause of most of the unwillingness to have children?

G. F.: Yes, rotten housing and an appalling shortage of what there is of it is undoubtedly one of the primary reasons why young married couples won't have children. The high cost of living generally is also responsible.

MYSELF: That's just the point. A young couple living, say, in London on one man's salary can scarcely pay their way now

G. F.: Yes. I agree. The cost of living must be brought down drastically after the war.

MYSELF: Going back to the subject of education again for a moment, do you think the children should receive instruction in citizenship, parenthood, etc.?

G. F.: That will best be done by teaching the children to think rationally for themselves, and not to swallow anything and everything they are told. The churches would do better if they taught their people to think for themselves more.

MYSELF: Are we showing anv signs of decadence as a nation V

Mr. Frankau looked across the lounge at four high-spirited RAF officers who were gleefully recalling recent experiences, and smiled:

No! not the faintest! The only signs of decadence I have seen are at the top and among some of the so-called intelligentsia.

MYSELF: **What do you think of the "Bloomsbury" type of intellectual?**

G. F.: Frankly, they're not worth the consideration of well-balanced minds.

MYSELF: **Have you any other suggestions concerning the improvement of the social services?**

G. F.: I think there is a good deal to be done in altering the spirit of the people.

MYSELF: **Have you any sympathy for those who go on strike in wartime?**

G. F.: Not a scrap. They should be treated as deserters from the army.

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MYSELF: **Have you any views on the re-planning of the towns?**

G. F.: That's a big subject. There will certainly have to be planning, and when rebuilding starts there will have to be control of private enterprise in the interests of the community. This is another case where compromise is necessary—and a benevolent, reasonable control.

MYSELF: **Can you say anything on the future of the theatre?**

G. F.: There again, I'm not really qualified to speak authoritatively, as I'm primarily a novelist, so my opinion would only be an amateur one. My chief desire is to see the price of theatre seats reduced, because thousands who love the theatre simply can't afford to go now-a-days. The prices in London are far too high, and I don't think they are particularly cheap in the provinces.

MYSELF: **YOU don't think that television will ruin the theatre in the future?**

G. F.: No. I don't think so. There will always be a theatre!

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MYSELF: **Well, we have certainly covered a good bit of ground this evening. May I ask a few personal questions before we pack up?"**

G. F.: Fire away.

MYSELF: **Do you read very much these days?**

G. F.: Chieily for instruction. I'm doing quite a lot of studying, but I read only occasionally for enjoyment.

MYSELF: **Who are your favourite authors?**

G. F.: Kipling is my "master," as you know. But poetry is my real love; I am passionately fond of Byron, Keats, Shelley and Browning. Of the moderns I place Humbert Wolfe very highly.

MYSELF: DO **you play any games now?**

G. F.: My knee put a stop to my tennis, but I do quite a lot of fencing when I can spare the time.

MYSELF: **Many authors have queer ways of working. How do you arrange your day's work?**

G. F.: I discipline myself to a strict routine. I find it's the only way to get things done. Most of my writing is done in the morning. I start work at 9.30 and stay at my desk until 1.0, when I have lunch.

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There you have the catechism minus the usual polite observances and irrelevancies. Let me finish this sketch with a few words about his personal appearance. If you met Gilbert Frankau in the street you might easily judge him to be a schoolmaster or a doctor. He is fairly tall and slim; he has a scholarly face and grey hair. I can't help feeling that the photograph of him in this book conveys an impression of sternness; he might have revealed that trait when he was in the Services, but I don't think it is characteristic of him to-day. He has almost a mischievous smile, and jolly twinkling eyes. He talks with the verve of a youngster but with the assurance of a man of great experience.

When I told a friend that I was meeting Gilbert Frankau he sniffed and said,"He's a pukka sahib . . . an extremist . . . and I'll bet you a bob he dresses for dinner every evening." I'll have to collect that shilling sometime. .1 found exactly the opposite. He entirely lacked the faintly ridiculous attributes of "pukka-sahibism"; he had no extreme views on any subject, and he was wearing grey flannel trousers and a Donegal tweed jacket.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

LAURENCE HOUSMAN, who is now 77, is the younger brother of the late A. E. Housman, the eminent poet who gave us *The Shropshire Lad* and other poems of great beauty. Although he shared his brother's love of poetry, and wrote a fair amount of verse himself, Laurence Housman is known to most of us chiefly as a playwright of distinction.

He is a native of Worcestershire. As a child, he was one of a family of seven who lived in a comfortable old house near Bromsgrove Church. It was a typical Victorian household where family prayers before the principal meals were a solemn ritual in which the domestic servants took part before serving "their betters".

He went as a day-boy to Bromsgrove School, and suffered under a headmaster whose snobbishness went so far as encouraging the boarders (most of whom came from the homes of the well-to-do) to persecute their poorer brethren who lived at home. This kind-hearted gentleman noticed that Laurence Housman was father poorly clad and told him before the whole class that he must come to school better dressed. Naturally, the more spiteful boys derived a fiendish joy from this public humiliation, and considered themselves to be officially authorized to perpetrate innumerable brutalities at opportune moments. In his autobiography, *The Unexpected Years*, Mr. Housman declares: "Defenders of the public school system—as it existed in my day, and as they would like it to continue—maintain that the bullying of small boys is good for them, and has a healthy and hardening effect on their characters. It may be so; but what of its effects on those who do the bullying? It seems to me a cowardly and despicable thing for the strong to afflict the weak; and I am inclined to think the divine right of Imperialism to swagger through the world, exploiting subject races for their supposed benefit, has very largely had its origin in the bullying and fagging which have been countenanced in our public schools." Later in the same book he adds ". . . power seems to bring out not only the cruelty and injustice of the masterful ones, it brings out also their stupidity. A headmaster, who afterwards became an archbishop, flogged a boy into confessing to something he had not done. ..."

When he left school, Mr. Housman came to London to study art

and began writing in his spare time. At the age of 18 he had an article accepted by the editor of *The Comhill*—who put it into print just seven years later! Another of his early literary activities was the editing of a selection of the writings of William Blake, which was published in 1893. In the same year his first book of poems, *Green Arras,* was published, but it was some time before his income averaged much more than about £50 a year.

At the age of 80 he was appointed art critic to the *Manchester Guardian,* which was then being edited by C. P. Scott. On one occasion he had only twenty-four hours in which to write three columns on the history of Art in Europe during the last 100 years!

His first book to be widely read was *An Englishwoman's Love Letters.* It came out in 1900 as an anonymous publication, and set all London guessing the name of its author. Many people decided that it was the work of Mrs. Meynell, but others attributed it either to Marie Corelli or to Oscar Wilde. The secret came out through the indiscretion of an editor who had been told in confidence, and although its sales declined a little as a result, it brought Mr. Housman's income for that year over the £2,000 mark. No less than sixteen unofficial "pirated" editions were sold in America.

Its successor, *A Modern Antceus,* published by John Murray, sold fewer copies although it was an infinitely better book. A possible explanation is that his brother had leapt into the limelight with *A Shropshire Lad,* and its success somewhat overshadowed Laurence Housman's work for a few months.

Sabrina Warham was written after camping experiences on the Dorset coast, where many of the incidents recorded actually occurred.

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His career as a playwright started with *Prunella,* written in collaboration with Granville Barker. At first it ran at a loss, but it was successfully revived over and over again in London, and ultimately made into a film. When it was staged at the Little Theatre, New York, in 1914, it ran for over three months.

Mr. Housman's troubles with the Censor started when certain Incidents in his historical play *Pains and Penalties* displeased the Lord Chamberlain, who consequently refused to grant a licence. A lengthy struggle ensued, and it took ten years for the official brains to decide that this play dealing with the relations of King George IV with his wife Caroline was fit for public performance. One sentence "Heirs male of the last generation have not been a conspicuous

success", and the one word "adultery" had to be omitted before it was licensed. When Mr. Housman pointed out to Sir Douglas Dawson that the word in question is said in the churches every Sunday before men, women and children, he was told that in church it meant nothing, but on the stage it meant everything!

In 1912 he wrote a novel of political and social satire called *John of Jingalo.* In *The Unexpected Years* he says, "Like its sequel *The Royal Runaway* and the others which followed, it was a disguised commentary on certain contemporary events and public characters, as scathing as I could make it; the first-named having been prompted by the Liberal Government's hanky-panky manipulation of King and Constitution, and its dishonest treatment of the Woman Suffrage Movement."

His sympathy for the "Suffragettes" was not merely passive; he assisted them in every possible way, and his house became a veritable rendezvous for irate women. After their victory, they showed their gratitude by presenting him with a comfortable and dignified library chair, which he still uses daily.

During the Great War he worked as the secretary of a large home for Belgian refugees in Ealing. It was not an easy task, for many of them were extremely difficult people to deal with. When the atrocity stories were in vogue, a rumour went round that he had in his care a little child whose hands had been cut off by the Germans. The inevitable newspaper reporter called to "write-up" the story, and was genuinely surprised to hear that it was quite false. Nevertheless, when his report went into the paper, the man had the audacity to affirm that he had actually seen the child. Mr. Housman immediately addressed a letter of protest to the editor, but it was politely ignored.

It should be noted that Mr. Housman was not a pacifist during the last war. It was the "Peace lost at Versailles" that convinced him that no good could come out of war "however righteous its intention".

In 1916 he went to America to lecture on the proposed League of Nations. One of the more favourable impressions he had of that country was the sight of parcels left piled up against the pillar-boxes awaiting collection. He told the American friend he was with at the time that in England we were not sufficiently trustworthy for this procedure to be adopted.

He returned to this country to write *Sister Gold,* the first of his

Little Plays of St. Francis; and *The Sheepfold,* the story of a shepherdess who lost her sheep.

His second visit to America was made in 1920, when he lectured in New York and stayed a few weeks at the Brookwood Community School, "a charming example of naive American idealism". This "half-school, half-farm", as he describes it, was supposed to have been a self-supporting community of students who shared all the domestic work between them. Perhaps his most amusing experience of this visit was a brief encounter with a coloured waiter who was laying a table. The man was separating paper bags with a frequently-licked thumb, blowing each one open with his breath and inserting a roll into it. This was a "sanitary" method of keeping the roll wholesome until the diner was ready to eat it!

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After the war, he lived for a few years at New Milton, Hampshire, while he was searching for a suitable country house. One day, he visited some friends at Street, in Somerset, and was so charmed by the quiet, pastoral country he saw around him that he bought part of a large field, and had his present home "Longmeadow" built upon it. It was a happy choice, for he not only enjoyed rural seclusion, but came into contact with Rutland Boughton, the founder of the Glastonbury Festival, who offered to stage a full programme of his. famous *Little Plays of St. Francis.* They were well appreciated, and were afterwards taken on tour by a travelling company which visited several of the larger towns and ultimately performed the plays at the Polytechnic in London.

Victoria Regina, generally considered to be Housman's masterpiece, is a collection of his plays in the Victorian series. It was banned by the Censor, and not until 1986 did the King command the Lord Chamberlain to license it for public performance. A selection of the plays in this cycle were staged privately at the Gate Theatre in 1935, with Pamela Stanley in the title-role. When it was taken to America, *Victoria Regina* was received with great enthusiasm.

It was the zeal of the University College (London) Dramatic Society that was responsible for the increase in the number of the *Little Plays of St. Francis* to forty-five, and Laurence Housman wrote the *Epilogue* expressly for the use of these keen and talented players. Bernard Shaw was invited on one occasion to take the part of the Doctor in this Epilogue, but he wrote to the producer refusing the offer with the excuse that he would be mistaken lor God Himself!

Mr. Housman still lives at Street, and never ceases to be thankful for his escape from the noise and dust of London; "... for me, as a place of domicile, Somerset with its accompaniments is as near Heaven as I am ever likely to get." He loves birds and cats, but finds that they don't go very well together.

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When I wrote to him on the subject of this book, he kindly sent me a set of his *Propositions,* with permission to quote from them. I hope the following extracts will help my readers to understand Mr. Housman's outlook on life:

"Communion enlarges potentially, and makes more effective for action, the spirit or personality of the individual.

All 'divine' laws have come to man by a gradual revelation of what truly is best for him. And the injunctions and prohibitions of divine law have been framed upon human experience, which *is* revelation.

That a man is living truly to the will of God is proved if he bears the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, gentleness, peace, long-suffering, mercy, endurance; and there is no other proof of it.

However true a revelation may be, it becomes falsified by compulsion; and in the life so compelled is thereby degraded to partake of the nature of superstition.

No external phenomenon—normal or abnormal—has any significance beyond the material plane of its operation. Storm, earthquake, or bad weather for the crops were never an expression of divine displeasure or of moral judgment upon the ways of man.

Truth for man is necessarily relative—not absolute; he can only conceive of truth through a mental apparatus which is relative in all its functions. Man may conceive that the Absolute exists, but he can have no notion of what the Absolute is like or how it functions. Indeed, the question is whether the Absolute can function without becoming relative."

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When I asked his views on Reconstruction, Mr. Housman told me: "My political views are best summed up in the statement that I am an Internationalist, and that salvation will only come to the world in the fulfilment of the almost wholly abandoned Christian teaching of doing to others as we would they should do to us. Nationalism, which is the epitome of self-interest, and the root of most of the evils which we have brought on ourselves, is the great obstacle. For our blind

acceptance of that, this war is just retribution, though it comes on us through an unjust agency. You probably know that I am a pacifist; I am, therefore, very doubtful of this, or any other country, winning peace for the world while it believes in war as a means to that end; but as far as I have any hopes of better things when the war is over, they are in the 'Left-wing' direction; and therefore I should regard anything *short* of the Beveridge plan as crass foolishness."

* * * * *

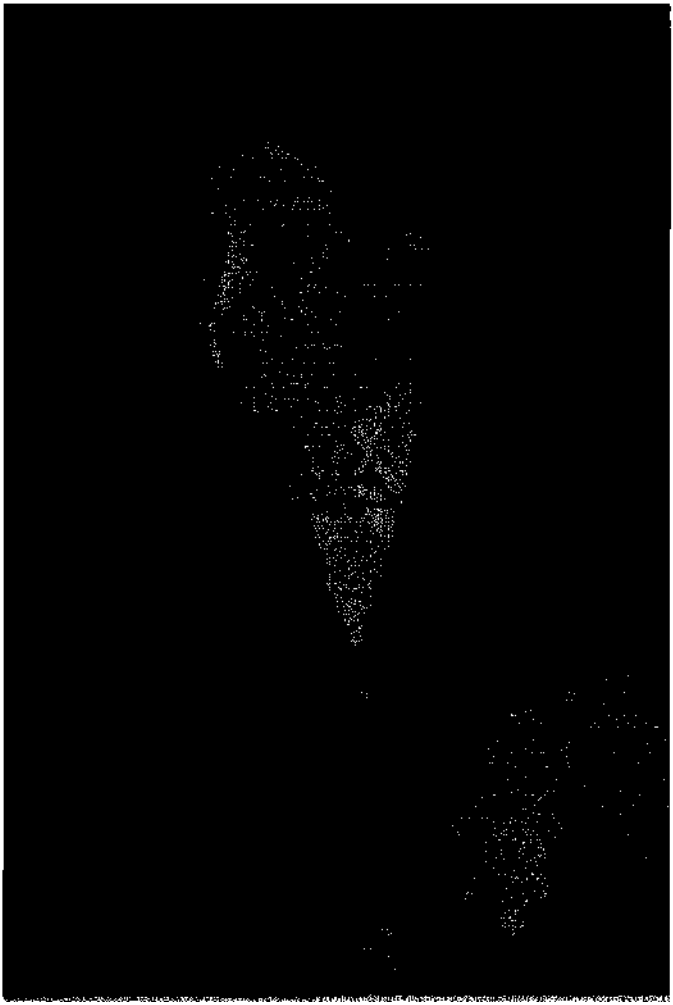
To conclude this sketch of Laurence Housman, I will quote a passage from a letter he wrote to me during the summer when this book was in preparation:

"As regards my literary and dramatic work, what gives me most satisfaction as a playwright is that all my life I have fought the Censorship—I have had more of my plays censored than any other playwright (about 88 in all) and have succeeded in getting the censoring reversed in relation to about 20 of them; and I have very little doubt that when I renew my application, as need arises, for licences previously refused, nearly all will be granted without further trouble."

His latest works include: *Palace Scenes, A.E.H.* (the life of his brother, who died in 1936), and *The Golden Sovereign,* both written in 1987; *What Next?* (1988); *What Can We Believe?* (letters between Dick Sheppard and Laurence Housman written in 1989); *The Preparation of Peace* (1940); *Gracious Majesty* (1941) and *Palestine Plays* (1942).

Photograph by Emery Walker Ltd.

Laurence Housman



Photograph *by Waiter Davey* & SCH;

Naomi Jacob

NAOMI JACOB

MY next two sketches are of lady novelists of Yorkshire origin: Naomi Jacob and Storm Jameson, but I am going to resist the temptation to put them both in the same picture.

Miss Jacob is a native of Ripon. From what I gather, her mother must have been one of the most sensible and lovable women in all the West Riding, and consequently Miss Jacob has happy memories of her childhood at home. In *Me: A Chronicle about Other People* she says: "My early childhood meant to me long sunny days, walks through meadows knee deep in green grass and wild flowers, a wide rushing river which in places was so shallow that one could wade over it. Long summer evenings, when one lay in bed with the windows opening on to the garden and heard the sound of my mother's voice, and the click-click of croquet balls, and at intervals the deep tones of the Cathedral clock. A long low old-fashioned house, very smooth lawns, and a syringa bush which smelt like heaven. Dogs, cats, birds, . . . My own rabbits, guinea pigs, and once an owl. Myself always beginning the day very clean, and determined to keep so, and five minutes later being caught by my nurse and dragged back to be ^cleaned and redded oop' with the comment that I was *a proper Mick'."

That quotation also explains how she got the nickname "Micky", by which she is still known to all her friends and even to quite distant acquaintances in the literary world.

Her schooldays were not so pleasant, for she was not a model child, and went from school to school "leaving a trail of bad marks and a reputation for unruliness, rudeness and idleness" behind her. When in desperation her mother at last sent her to Leeds Higher Grade School she found some consolation in the discovery of the Art Gallery and the Grand Theatre. She used to save her luncheon money during the week so that on Saturday afternoon she could go in the sixpenny seats at the matinee.

She loved to play cricket—preferably with boys—and regularly finished her nightly prayers with the invocation "Please God make me like W. G. Grace". Dancing classes, on the other hand, were not much in her line; she danced like a baby elephant. She had dozens of youthful love affairs of the dreadfully sincere, innocent variety. In

Me—Again she says she refuses to believe that parents "would swoon with horror if they knew a quarter of the sexual life of their children", as one well-known writer declared recently, and she believes that these youthful love affairs are quite harmless.

* * * * . *

When she left school she went as a teacher in a church school at Middlesbrough, it was the most wretched experience of her life, for she had classes of children drawn from the very poorest homes, where unspeakable conditions were rife. She found alleys where two earth-closets—both without doors—served twelve houses each containing families of seven or eight. Verminous children were to be found everywhere, and on one occasion when she told a child whose skin was covered with angry red spots that she had measles, she received the scornful reply:

Them, Miss? Oh, them's flea-bites."

When an effort was made to improve these deplorable conditions and to instil the principles of hygiene into the children's minds, a local clergyman remarked: "A pity; this will. I fear, fill the children's heads with ideas above their station."

Miss Jacob's salary for teaching in this delightful church school was at first £13 a year, until she won a King's Scholarship, making her entitled to £40 a year and giving her the right to possess and use her own cane! When she began to make a few friends, the Vicar reproved her for going about with her betters! She took a keen, active interest in politics, and went to many Suffragette meetings, where on one occasion she heard Mrs. Pankhurst speak. At this particular meeting an unpleasant weedy-looking youth asked Mrs. Pankhurst to answer *honestly if she could* the question: "At the bottom of your 'eart. don't you think that, reely, you'd like to be a man?" That courageous woman replied: "Quite honestly, my friend, I don't know—but don't you wish that you were?"

* * * * *

Naomi Jacob endured the teaching profession, such as it was, for a few years and then went as "secretary, companion, manager and courier" to Marguerite Broadfoote, the Scottish comedienne. At that time the music halls were at the height of their prosperity. In *Me* she tells a great number of entertaining stories of life in the'"Variety" world She toured the whole country, and grew to love everybody and everything connected with the music halls, with the exception

of those people who train performing animals. Miss Jacob declares emphatically that the slogan "All done by kindness" is a thumping lie; she knows how the wretched animals suffer unspeakable cruelties before they become so broken in spirit that they respond to the trainer's wishes. She implores the public to boycott "animal acts" as well as any turns of the daring type in which men and women risk their lives. In *Me—Again* she shows the seamy side of the circus; the circus which the public knows only as a place of fun, laughter and thrills.

In the same book she maintains that the Variety profession is the hardest working class in the world, and that as a body they are the most likeable she has ever met.

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Miss Jacob worked in a munitions factory at Willesden during the Great War, where as supervisor she had to feed five hundred men and women. One of her recollections of the last war is a recruiting meeting at which a frock-coated gentleman drew forth a thunderous applause by telling his'audience that they were going to win the war because, among other things, there was still a God in heaven. As he walked off the platform Miss Jacob heard him say to a man at the side: "Christ! that fetched them all right, eh?"

In 1919 she had to go into a sanatorium, which she decided was rather worse than having to go to school. However, in three years she conquered consumption, and for those who are interested in the subject there is a full "story" of her illness in *Me—Again,* with heaps of very good practical advice for the victims of this disease. It wrecked her career as an actress, and although she later found fame as a novelist, she was bitterly disappointed when finally she was compelled to give up the stage she loved. The present war has brought her back to the theatre, but of that I shall have more to say later.

I am going ahead too quickly; let me go back a little and tell you something about Naomi Jacob as an actress. When she came out of the sanatorium she got a job with a touring company playing *Scandal.* This lasted for thirteen weeks, and then she went to the Comedy Theatre, London, and got the cook's part in *The Ruined Lady.* That gave her a good start and she soon became well known in many of the best companies. She has always preferred to play the part of middle-aged women—drunken charwomen or landladies for preference! She once played with Noel Coward in *The Young Idea.* On another occasion when she was at Hull she had the horrifying experi-

ence of seeing the ill-fated airship R 86 break up in mid-air. One of her longest engagements was in *The Ringer,* and she frequently met Edgar Wallace, the author, at rehearsals. Although he had become quite famous by that time she found him unaffected and very kind to everybody. Incidentally, the play was produced by Sir Gerald du Maurier.

Just when everything was going well for her, and she had signed a contract to play in a film at Elstree, her health broke down again and she was obliged to go and live in Italy.

* * * * *

Naomi Jacob's first novel was written when she was only nineteen. Hutchinson's refused it, but advised her to go on trying. Her first book to appear in print, *Jacob Ussher,* was an adaptation of H. V. Esmond's play, *Birds of a Feather.* When she arrived in Italy she had nothing but her typewriter and a packet of paper with which to earn her living. She settled at Sermione, on the shores of Lago di Garda, where there was nothing except "the sky and the blue lake and the good air and the blessed sunshine". In *Me—Again* she says: "There were days—particularly about seven, when the hearts of all good pros, turn towards the stage door, and their fingers itch for a stick of grease paint—when I was acutely miserable, when I used to walk to the end of the garden and stare across the lake towards Desenzano and the lights, and feel that I couldn't stand it for another twenty-four hours. But sanity always returned, and slowly I began to be happy, content to pick up a few words of Italian, and to get well again."

She stayed at Sermione until shortly before Italy's entry into the present war, although she had been returning to this country once a year to keep in touch with her friends and to lecture in various parts of the country. She also visited America, and on one occasion broadcast from New York. Her impression of that country was very favourable, and although she enjoyed the variety of American food, she found that they couldn't roast beef or make a Yorkshire pudding to her taste. She liked the dry, clean, exhilarating air of New York, and appreciated the American keenness to know everything about people, books, politics, psychology, etc. She hopes to visit the United State* again after the war.

* * * * *

Miss Jacob's famous war book. *Honour Come Back,* won the

Eichejberger Prize—the one award she had always coveted, but she felt obliged to refuse it because of its association with Hitler.

When the war clouds began to gather in 1989 she was still living at Sermione. Chiefly to allay the anxiety of her friends who had telegraphed to her, she came back to England in August, arriving at Folkestone still convinced that Hitler was once again playing his old game of bluff. On that memorable Sunday, September 3rd, she was staying with some friends in Surrey, and heard Mr. Chamberlain's declaration of war on their wireless. She returned to London and offered her services to ENSA, and once again became an officer in the Women's Legion. After a few months in town, however, her doctor advised her to return to Italy as soon as possible because the climate here was telling adversely upon her health. She arrived back in Sermione just before Christmas.

When Italy entered the war she was staying in France, at Saint Raphael. Mussolini's cruel stroke was a bitter surprise to her, and she was obliged to hasten to Cannes where crowds of other British subjects were besieging the Customs house prior to their departure to the mother country. The smart set were expecting a luxury liner, and you can imagine their horror when two very grimy little colliers steamed into the harbour. Naomi Jacob and her friends went aboard the *Ashcrest* (soon to be dubbed the "Ashbin") and found that the passengers were expected to sleep in the hold that had recently been emptied of coal!

When you come to my sketch of Somerset Maugham you will find that he experienced similar hardships when he, too, was compelled to return from Cannes, and I think it not at all unlikely that he was aboard the other collier that accompanied the *Ashcrest.* Whether the conditions on Miss Jacob's boat were any worse than on his I do not know, but food was very scarce—they had to exist chiefly on biscuits and bully beef, and there was no water for washing. Two lavatories only were available for the use of the six hundred passengers, and Miss Jacob tells in her book *Me in Wartime* how they had to appoint wardens to marshal the queues for these conveniences. The "lavatory wardens" brightened the procedure considerably by their good-hearted jokes about their newly-found position in the social scale! Miss Jacob also tells how she managed to keep her face clean with creams and lotions, but it never occurred to her that her ears and neck were acquiring a negroid hue, and it was not until a friend told her to look in a mirror that she realized quite how much coal dust she had attracted.

To be quite fair to both Miss Jameson and Mr. Ervine, it should be recorded that he later made amends by giving her a great deal of valuable advice, and offered to send one of her novels with his recommendation to an American publisher.

Her student days in London were delightfully happy and carefree, and she remembers with appreciation the theatres, concert halls, second-hand bookshops, the restaurants and the socialist orators in the parks!

Like Ethei Mannin she worked as a copy-writer for an advertising firm during the early days of her literary career, though it was not long before she was editing a weekly magazine. Her first book, *The Pot Boils,* she now regards as a poor effort, and she has little to say in favour of her second novel, *Happy Highways,* which appeared in 1920. "When I think of my early novels," she says, "I find it hard to believe that they represent the higher side of my nature. . . . When I was writing them my mind was only half in them. The other half was tense longing for the chance to try something real. I have been torn between desire for a material success . . . and the need, not clearly understood by me, for spiritual satisfaction."

The Pitiful Wife, which appeared in 1923, was certainly more successful, and it attracted a considerable amount of attention. In 1926 she published *The Three Kingdoms,* which tells of the difficulties of married women who wish to make a career for themselves and carry out their domestic duties at the same time. She is inclined to agree with Miss Vera Brittain, who considers that the combination is not ideal unless adequate domestic assistance is available, and that sooner or later one or the other is bound to suffer.

A few years later Miss Jameson wrote a trilogy, *The Lovely Ship, The Voyage Home* and *A Richer Dust,* based on the life of a woman in the Victorian era. *The Decline of Merry England,* which she describes as "an historical essay", came out in 1930, and is worthy of attention.

Her latest novels, *The Fort, Cousin Honori, Europe to Let, Farewell Night, That was Yesterday, Then We Shall Hear Singing* (1942), and *Cloudless May* (1943), all reach a high standard, and have brought her into the front rank of living women novelists.

In *No Time Like the Present,* which she wrote in 1932, she attacked the Church's indifference to the social problems of the day. "1 cannot respect the fervour that masses huge sums of money to build a Cathedral in a city (Liverpool) which contains some of the foulest slums in England. My mind is revolted by the contrast between that

costly building and a court in which nearly seventy persons live and enjoy the use of two water-closets. ..."

In the same book she severely criticizes the sentimental novels that fill the bookshelves of the cheaper lending libraries. "Nine out of ten novelists," she declares, "deserve to be prosecuted under an Adulterated Emotions Act."

* * * * *

What is Storm Jameson like today? She leads a busy life, and when she can find time for recreation enjoys walking and dancing, and the riding of both horses and bicycles. She is still very fond of Whitby with it& cliffs and heavy winter seas, and that, perhaps, is why many of her favourite books are about ships—and the men who sail in them.

She has been the President of the London Centre of the Interna tionai PEN Club (a world association of poets, playwrights, editors, essayists and novelists) since 1988, and was the Chairman of tin* Society of Authors from 1940 to 1941.

Her attitude towards the present war and the problems of tomorrow is expressed in *The End of This War,* which she wrote in 1941 and had published as a PEN booklet. It will be recalled that for many years she was a pacifist, but as the true intentions of the dictators became apparent, she felt that passive resistance to them would only encourage their lust for power and wealth. Miss Jameson admits that in her opinion the present war could not have been averted unless this country had surrendered completely to Germany. At one time she thought that we might possibly have negotiated with Hitler in the early days of his dictatorship, but now she realizes that he would have eventually betrayed us. The fate of the Poles and Czechs has convinced her that any sort of compromise with German tyranny would have meant the end of civilization. She believes that the total defeat of the German military machine is only half the battle, for the reconstruction of a social order in Europe will require just as great an effort on our part.

Miss Jameson contends that we shall not be able to keep Germany and Italy permanently disarmed, and that we should rather concentrate on re-educating them to take an active part in the new social structure. She insists upon the necessity ot a "super-national authority" to take control, without which there can be no hope of permanent peace. To do this, a military occupation of Germany and Italy would be inevitable, but there should be no "punishment" of

the "guilty" populations. We must re-create a Germany we can live with, and that will necessitate putting our own house in order first. "The only social change worth working and hoping for," declares Miss Jameson, "involves the death of what R. H. Tawney named the Acquisitive Society." She contends that the profit system will have to go, for it never succeeded in saving the people from hunger and insecurity, but "vomited slums over the whole country".

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH acknowledges that the hyphen in her name has a snobbish origin. Her mother, whose maiden name was de la Condamine, bitterly resented being called plain Mrs. Smith after her marriage, and as the Kayes (an old Lincolnshire family) were the more eminent of her forbears, she decided to honour their memory and to acquire a little distinction for herself by adopting their name.

Miss Kaye-Smith was born in 1884 at St. Leonards-on-Sea, and was brought up in an old-fashioned religious environment, so that she had a "working knowledge" of the Old and New Testaments even before she was able to read. It should be noted, however, that she was not quite so credulous as the average child of the "nineties", for she never swallowed the hell-fire business which was so much in vogue in those days. The possibility of a candescent destination certainly never worried her. In *Three Ways Home* she says that when she was given "letter biscuits" she used to eat "J" with special veneration because it stood for Jesus,—until some cynical person reminded her that it also stood for Judas!

She began writing at a tender age, and actually completed over a dozen short novels, written in exercise books, before she left school. They were written entirely for her own amusement, although she had firmly made up her mind to become a famous author when she grew up. Most of her early efforts had the rural Sussex background which she later used so successfully when she wrote for publication. In her second published novel, *Starbrace,* she drew to a considerable extent upon the material used in her exercise books. Until her first book had been accepted for publication nobody took her writing seriously; her parents were so accustomed to seeing her scribbling that they never bothered to ask her what she was doing.

When she "came out" into the life of local society she discovered that the dreary "At Homes", garden parties, and fashionable Hunt Balls were very boring to an active and highly imaginative young woman, and as far as possible she avoided the company of the idle gentlefolk around her.

Her first full-length novel, *The Tramping Methodist,* was completed before she was twenty years of age, and to pay for it to be typewritten

she had to borrow the money from her parents. Part of it she repaid by cleaning the stairs every day for a month. In due course, it was despatched to a literary agent, who eventually succeeded in getting it accepted by Messrs. George Bell & Sons. It sold only 850 copies, but she was encouraged to persevere with her writing by both her agent and her publisher, to whom, we are told, she must have appeared the "rawest, greenest author of all their experience". It was in this novel that she made the moon rise twice in the same evening—in different phases! Fortunately, her publishers noticed it at the last moment and were able to make the necessary alteration before the presses were started.

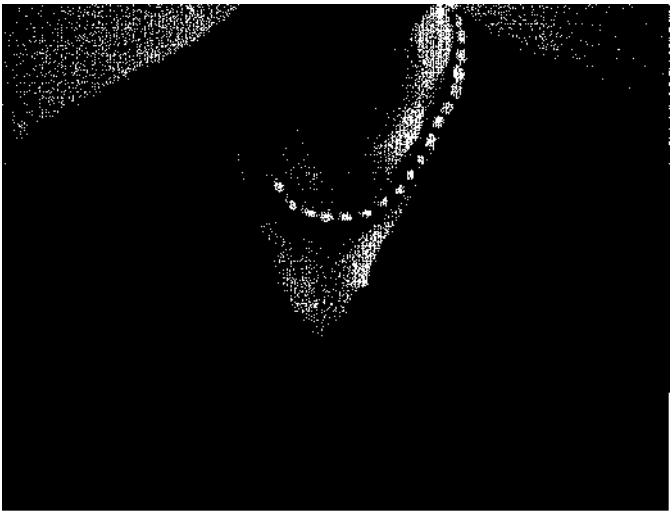
Shortly after the publication of *Slarbrace* her agent told her that she ought to spend a few months in London to "see life" and to learn more about the way other people lived. She responded to the suggestion by spending a fortnight in town chiefly in riding on 'buses and eating chocolate Eclairs at the establishments of Messrs. Lyons, but was disappointed to find that she learnt very little. Her second visit was more effective, because she stayed at a students' boarding-house in South Kensington and made the acquaintance of many young people of a type hitherto unknown to her. She also had the good fortune to meet Miss Alice Meynell, who introduced her to various people in the literary world. "I spent one Sunday evening at her flat, and was profoundly shaken by the experience. The atmosphere—artistic, cultured, casual—was entirely different from that of my own home, where Sunday supper meant the family sitting down in state to eat cold beef and prunes and talk about the evening's sermon.'

For *Spell Land,* her third novel, she received an advance of £40 which took her on a holiday to Paris. Alas! this further attempt to "see life" was frustrated soon after she arrived. She contracted pneumonia and was obliged to spend six months in bed.

Her first novel to make any marked impression upon the reading public was *Sussex Gorse,* and although little more than a thousand copies of it were sold, it did much to help her establish a reputation. People began to refer to her as "the Sussex novelist".

* * * * *

During the Great War Miss Kaye-Smith undertook a certain amount of war-work, without any great enthusiasm. "I made swabs and bandages, I sold tea and doughnuts in a canteen, I added to the muddle of a War Office department" she tells us in *Three Ways*



Phaosraph by Press *Portrait Bureau*

Storm Jameson

Photograph by Kay Vaughan

Sheila Kaye-Smith

Home,.but adds that unlike so many writers at that period she was never really absorbed in the war, nor was she distracted by it. She knew nobody in the Services, and felt no great patriotic emotions. She had no patience with the distributors of white feathers, but on the other hand she did not definitely associate herself with the pacifists.

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Tamarisk Town was her first attempt at a purely urban novel. It was described by Frank Swinnerton as "a noble failure", but it sold over 3,000 copies, and gave her an "almost matrimonial security of publication" which she has enjoyed ever since. She reverted to the Sussex scene for *Green Apple Harvest,* which came into the ranks of the best-sellers, and which she considers to be her best novel. *Joanna Godden* appeared in 1921, and then she produced *The End of the House of Alard,* a tremendous success, particularly gratifying to the ever-growing congregations of the Anglo-Catholic churches.

Her next three novels, *The George and the Crown,* in which the Isle of Sark forms a background, *Iron and Smoke,* and *The Village Doctor,* were not quite up to the standard of their predecessors, due, it was thought, to the fact that she had left Sussex to live in London, for in 1924 she had married the Rev. T. Penrose Fry, a curate of a church in Hastings, who later accepted a curacy in town.

In 1929 they were both received into the Church of Rome by Father Martindale, the eminent Jesuit, which meant, of course, that Mr. Fry had to renounce his orders. They returned to Sussex, and settled in a farm known as Little Doucegrove, which she had already described in her early novel *Spell Land,*

Religion has played an important part in the fife of Sheila Kaye-Smith, and it figured prominently in *The End of the House of Alard,* with the result that she was considered to be a religious propagandist. "If Sussex is a label", she tells us, "religion is a dye and there is no getting away from it. The public does not necessarily object to propaganda, but it likes the propaganda to propagate something it wants, like divorce, not something like Catholicism which it does not -want and largely disapproves of."

Much of her own personal experience appeared in *The End of the House of Alard* and it sold in greater numbers than any of her former books, despite the fact that most of the reviews were unfavourable because of the religious element in it. It was also published in America, and brought her in more money than she had ever had in her life.

Referring to her brief experience as a parson's wife, Miss Kaye-Smith says in *Three Ways Home:* "I found myself in a little group of clergymen's wives who were as lilies of the field in so far as parochial matters were concerned, though in their own homes many of them did the work of nurse, teacher, housemaid and cook. I am inclined to think that the clergyman's wife is in some ways the most maligned woman of the community. In novels she is nearly always represented us stupid, domineering, interfering, a gossip, a busybody and uncharitable—always uncharitable. . . .My own experience ... is that she is very far from deserving any of this. ... I have found the parson's wife thf first to help and protect the poor girl who 'gets into trouble'—contrary to one of the most respectable traditions of British fiction, which always puts the first stone in her hand."

Miss Kaye-Smith lias come to the conclusion that in England we are not quite normal on the subject of religion, particularly as far as Catholicism is concerned. "The attitude of many people today towards Catholicism, in fact towards any kind of religion, is not unlike that of an inhibited type of spinster towards sex. They giggle nervously or become angry and excited if it creeps into the conversation____"

She is passionately fond of Sussex, and was profoundly disturbed in 1933 by the effect of the great "slump" upon the agricultural life she saw around her. *The Ploughman's Progress* was written to draw attention to the appalling decay of husbandry in the county she loves.

Her more recent books include: *Superstition Corner* (1934),, *Gailybird* (1934), *Selina is Older* (1935), *Rose Deeprose* (1936), *Three Ways Home* (1937), *Faithful Stranger* (1938), *The Valiant Woman* (1938), *Ember Lane* (1940), *Hidden Son* (1942) and *Tambourine, Trumpet and Drum* (1943). They, are all written in a quiet, virile style, and are invariably well constructed. In *Literature in My Time,* Mr. Compton Mackenzie says "Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith's pages seldom rustle like the silk petticoats of once upon a time. Indeed, she seemed to enter the English novel in rather the same spirit as that in which land girls took up agriculture during the war, and she was one of the first women to assert her right to masculine objectivity without at the same time assuming the name George in order to do so."

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When I questioned Miss Kaye-Smith recently upon her views on the subject of post-war reconstruction, she told me that her chief hopes were concentrated in the expectation that we shall not defeat

the totalitarian nations at the expense of ourselves becoming a totalitarian State—under any form of government. She considers that there are some very disquieting signs of it already, not only in the present conditions, but in the forecasts of our social prophets. However necessary the principle of compulsion may be at the present time, she believes that it must not be allowed to interfere with personal liberties after the war.

COMPTON MACKENZIE

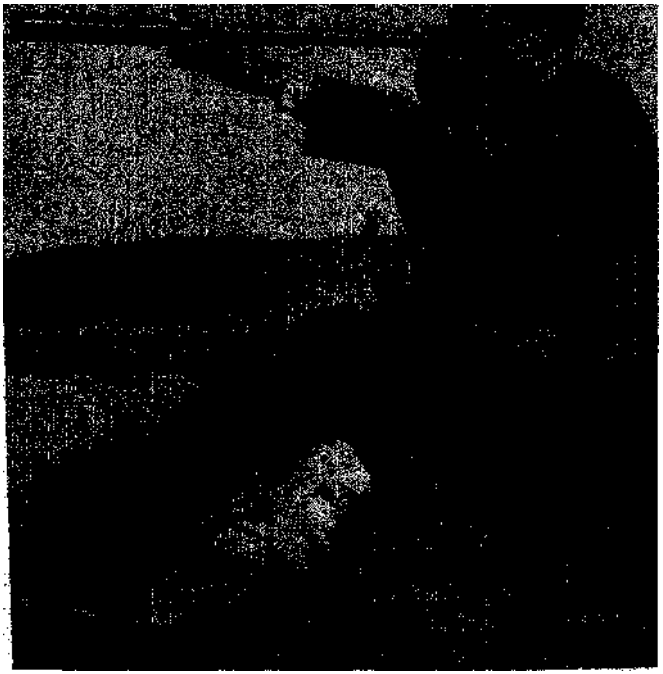
TO trace Mr. Compton Mackenzie's ancestry we have to go back through the records of generations of people who have figured prominently in the literary and dramatic professions during the past hundred years. His father, who was generally known as Edward Compton, was a distinguished exponent of Oltl English comedy, and was the founder of the Compton Comedy Company. Mr. Mackenzie's grandfather, whose stage name was Henry Compton, was a famous comedian in Victorian days; and his great-grandfather, John Mackenzie, was the writer of several important historical and theological publications. The family is a branch of the Mackenzie Clan of Scawell.

Mackenzie's great-great-aunt, Mary Mackenzie, was a successful novelist during the Regency period. Another rather interesting fact is that the father of Compton Mackenzie's mother was H. L. Bate man, of Baltimore, who was the first American impresario to exploit the stage in Britain, and who brought out Henry Irving at the Lyceum. I I. L. Bateman s wife, Sydney Frances Cowell, was a most successful playwright in her time; and her father, Joseph Cowell, was a well-known English actor, though he spent a great deal of his time in America, and had his very racy autobiography published by Harper's of New York. On his father's side of the genealogical tree, Mr. Compton Mackenzie is related to John Addington Symonds, Morell Mackenzie, and Rowland Hill.

My friends over the border will probably be very disappointed to know that Compton Mackenzie was born, not in Scotland, but in West Hartlepool on January 17, 1883. He spent his childhood in Kensington, and was educated at Colet Court, St. Paul's School, and Magdalen College, Oxford. As a boy, he was extremely fond of reading, and in a few years almost exhausted his father's extensive library. He particularly enjoyed Dickens, Scott and Thackeray.

At the age of seventeen, he was a second-lieutenant in the 1st V.B. Bedfordshire Regiment, and the Senior Subaltern of his company was Brig.-Gen. Lord Croft, the present Under-Secretary for War. Mr. Compton Mackenzie is probably the youngest man alive today who had a commission from Queen Victoria.

While he was an undergraduate, he edited a lively University



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Compton Mackenzie

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magazine railed *The Oxford Point of View,* and became very popular in College literary circles. He also acted as the Business Manager of the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and played in many of the Society's productions.

He came down from Oxford with a second class in Modern History, and went to live at the beautiful house known as Lady Ham, at Burford, where he met Miss Faith Stone, who later became his wife. This house, by the way, appears in his novel *Guy and Pauline* as "Flasher's Mead".

Like many other prominent novelists of today, Mackenzie chose quite a different profession in his youth: he became a student of the Inner Temple, but found that Law did not appeal to him, and he never took it seriously. In 1905 he married the lady I have just mentioned, who is the daughter of the Rev. E. D. Stone, sometime master of Eton College. Her brother is Christopher Stone, the popular broadcaster. As manv of my readers will know, Mrs. Faith Compton Mackenzie has herself written several very successful books.

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Compton Mackenzie's first play, *The Gentleman in Grey,* was pro-•duced in 1907 at the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh/In the same year he published a volume of poems, and then wrote his first novel, *The Passionate Elopement,* which was completed in 1908. Nearly every publisher in London rejected this splendid book, but at last it came to the notice of Mr. Martin Seeker, who published it in 1911. It was a tremendous success, four editions being called for in its first.year. If this book had failed to find a publisher, Compton Mackenzie might never have become a novelist, because he had made up his mind tc let the fate of the manuscript decide whether or not he had the iibility to become a successful author. While it was making its tour of the publishers' offices he was occupying himself in Cornwall with horticulture. In the summer of 1910 lie required a substantial amount of money to buy flowers, so he accepted a part in a Hall Caine play at the Garrick Theatre, but much to his relief it was taken off at the end of its first week.

In the autumn of the same year he met H. G. Pelissier of The Follies, who commissioned him to write a libretto for a revue at the Alhambra. P&issier, who had written the music, then engaged him *AS* the producer. Throughout 1911, when the sales of his first novel were going up in leaps and bounds, he worked for Pelissier, who shortly afterwards married Mackenzie's sister, Fay Compton, the

well-known actress and film-star. Most of this work was for the Follies at the Apollo Theatre.

The success of *The Passionate Elopement* brought the Mackenzies back to London, and they took a house in Westminster. In January 1912 his second novel, *Carnival,* was published, and was an immediate and outstanding success in England and in America. This novel,, based on the life of a ballet dancer, was discussed in every drawing-room in London. A dramatized version was demanded by William Brady, and in a little while the play was drawing packed houses on both sides of the Atlantic. Mackenzie went personally to New York to superintend its production in that city. *Carnival* has now been, made into both silent and sound films; it has been the subject of a radio opera; and as a radio play it has been revived repeatedly.

The two volumes of his famous *Sinister Street* were published in 1913 and 1914 respectively, but the first was banned by the circulating libraries until public opinion forced them to distribute it. At that time two or three other books were being banned, and a real battle ensued between the authors and publishers on one side, and the booksellers and circulating libraries on the other. The newspaper* referred to it as "The Banned Book Feud", and of course, the publications concerned received nation-wide publicity. *Sinister Street* wa& reviewed enthusiastically by the critics, and at last the retail trade surrendered. At Eton College the ban continued a little longer, but eventually the Headmaster gave in, and those boys who had not read it surreptitiously rushed like madmen to read this story of a sophisticated young man of the first decade of the present century.

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In April 1914 Mr. Compton Mackenzie became a Roman Catholic. In the autumn of the same year he was making repeated efforts to get into the Forces, but he was rejected on medical grounds, and retired to Capri to write *Guy and Pauline,* which was published in 1915. While this novel was stirring up a whirlwind of enthusiasm in London, Sir Ian Hamilton gave its author a chance to see active service. Mackenzie went to Gallipoli as a Lieutenant of the Royal Marines, in the Royal Naval Division; but in the autumn he had to be "invalided out", and was seconded for work in connection with the Intelligence Department at Athens, where he later became Military Control Officer, with the rank of Captain. Further promotion came in 1917 when he was appointed Director of the Aegean Intelligence Service, with headquarters on the island of Syra. At the end of that

year he was compelled to resign on account of ill-health, and was unable to get back into active service again. In recognition of his services he was given decorations of the Orders of the British Empire, the Legion of Honour, the White Eagle of Serbia, and of the Redeemer of Greece. He has written four volumes about his experiences during the war: *Gallipoli Memories, Athenian Memories, Greek Memories,* and *Aegean Memories.*

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After the Armistice, Mr. Compton Mackenzie leased from the Crown the two Channel Islands of Herm and Jethou. The former he gave up in 1923, but he lived on the latter until 1931, when he went to Scotland. Let me tell you something about these islands.

Herm covers an area of about 400 acres. It is about a mile-and-a-half in length, but it is not very wide. Its chief feature is its wealth of variegated scenery: lovely hills and valleys, woods, pleasant green fields, o splendid beach and romantic caves. What more could you want? When Compton Mackenzie took it over he found it in a very wild and neglected condition, for its previous owner, Prince Bliicher, had been compelled to leave it at the beginning of the Great War, and consequently its principal farm was in a sadly dilapidated condition. Mr. Mackenzie put a great deal of work and money into restoring it to working condition, but it was a heart-breaking business that should have been undertaken by a millionaire with a small army of skilled men and labourers. When he handed it over to its new owner in 1923 he was conscious of a great burden being lifted from his shoulders.

Jethou, where he then made his home, was quite a different problem. It is a much smaller island—I believe it is somewhere in the region of fifty acres—and its upkeep took only a fraction of the money he had been spending on Herm. He had a fine modern house there with all the conveniences to which we are accustomed in these days. He installed his entire library of 10,000 books there and made it a wonderful retreat; the "sort of thing that every writer dreams of. Have "you ever thought of living on an island where there are no shops, cinemas, theatres, dance-bands, neighbours' wireless sets, and —best of all—no rates or taxes? It wouldn't suit everybody; but remember, Compton Mackenzie is an "island-fan",—and Mrs. Faith Compton Mackenzie seems to be encouraging himl

In 1929, the Mackenzies planned to build a house on one ot the Shiant Islands, which they had bought at the Leverhulme sale, but

this proved to be impracticable, and in 1933 they went to live on the Isle of Barra, in the Outer Hebrides. They built a house to their own requirements, and still live there.

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Compton Mackenzie was prosecuted in 1933 under the Official Secrets Act for publishing the third volume of his war memories. He tells me that this gave him the "interesting if expensive experience of a trial at the Old Bailey". I believe he enjoyed it all immensely. The book was held up until 1938, when it was republished.

A year or two before this trial he was elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University, standing as a Scottish Nationalist, and an honorary degree of LL.D. was conferred upon him.

From 1932 to 1936 he was the literary critic of the *Daily Mail,* and during recent years he has done a great deal of reviewing. He once ran a weekly magazine for the purpose of criticizing the radio programmes. Just before the present war he became President of the Dickens Fellowship.

In political circles, Mr. Compton Mackenzie is remembered for his association with Cunninghame Graham in the formation of the Scottish Nationalist Party, and for his enthusiastic support of the Social Credit Party. In 1929 he was a guest of the Irish, nation at the Tailtean Games, and became interested in the problems and aspirations of Eire. He considers that Mr. de Valcra is one of the wisest statesmen in Europe.

Among the more interesting of his post-war novels are *Fairy Gold* (1926) in which he describes life on the Channel Islands; *Vestal Fire* (1927) which is a story set in the Isle of Capri; and *Rogues and Vagabonds* (1927) based on the life of a strolling player. His latest books are all of great interest: *Figure of Eight* (1936), *Pericles* (1937), *The Windsor "Tapestry* (1938), *A Musical Chair* (1939), *The Bed Tapeworm* (1941), *The Monarch of the Glen* (1941), *The Wind of Freedom* (1943). *Keep the Home Guard Turning* (1943), and *Mr. Roosevelt* (1943). The books of his famous series *The Winds of Love* have appeared in the following order: *East Wind* (1937), *South Wind* (1937), *West Wind* (1940), *West to North* (1940), *North Wind* (1941) and *North to East* (1942).

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Mr. Mackenzie is passionately fond of music. He founded *The Gramophone,* a magazine for all who listen seriously to recorded music, in 1923, and still edits it. For four years he wrote a weekly review of gramophone records in the *Sunday Pictorial.* He has one of

the finest and most comprehensive private collections of records in the world.

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Mr. Frank Swinnerton, who knows Mr. Mackenzie much better than 1 do, has very kindly given me permission to quote (from his *Autobiography)* his impressions of this eminent novelist. He once visited Compton Mackenzie on Herm, and found him "at the height of joy in tenancy of that lovely island; and as he led me, with a good deal of pride I thought, through the treasury of its beauties he discovered at every step some new gibe, pun, story, or fantasy with which to entertain both himself and his visitor. The fund seemed inexhaustible, and 1 have never known that particular fund to fail with Mackenzie. He would be a sick man indeed if his tongue could not twist the doctor's name, or the name of his ailment, into a pun, or if he could not think of a new joke at the expense of one or other of his contemporaries. That is a part of his nature, and once he became unable to make his friends laugh he would be most un happy."

Mr. Swinnerton goes on to tell how Mackenzie demonstrated his very fine gramophone, and showed him his magnificent library, while continuing to entertain him with sparkling conversation. "His inventions are bold enough to terrify the squeamish; his humour is fluent and far-reaching; and his memory is so tenacious that he recalls, as it seems to me, all that ever happened to him as if, instead of mingling with a million other stages of consciousness and losing definition, it had been learned by heart at its first occurrence."

Frank Swinnerton continues: "He knows the whole world of the flower-garden, botanically and horticulturally; the vices of men are recorded in his tablets as certainly as the movements of the tides or the names of the kings and queens of England. He has met many thousands of people, has well-conned them, and has tales to tell and imitations to give of each. It is not enough that he should invest their characters with immediate consistency; he must impersonate them with Dickcnsian zest. His mimicry is extravagantly good, and always marked by such a sense of the grotesque that he creates new people before one's eyes. He acts, he contrives, he entertains; ail with a gravity and a relish that doubles the entertainment and makes it Incomparable."

Mackenzie is tall and slim; a man of striking appearance, with all the characteristics one generally associates with famous actors. His

personality is unique; as Frank Swinnerton says, he is "one of the most diverting persons alive".

I will conclude with another of Mr. Swinnerton's impressions: "When I was in Hcrm I think he was breeding Great Danes; he has since become an expert in Siamese cats. But the appearance of his huge dog, Hamlet, was very frightening to me, and 1 think I must tell what happened. I had heard of this dog from Seeker, who said that each time it caught sight of him, it slowly and menacingly growled, so that he was afraid to move. Imagine my lear, therefore, when, as 1 sat in a low armchair, a door at the other end of the room opened and something which my fancy now makes as big as a flap-etired cart-horse lumbered in, saw me with ruminant bloodshot eyes, paused in astonishment as if it said: "Hullo! What have they got here now?' and came with a dreadful air of purpose across the room. Mackenzie, another man, and 1 sat perfectly still; and just as I prepared to scream my last, the dog, instead of biting me, laid his monstrous head upon my lap. We were all, I believe, equally thankful; and it is true that no man would seriously care to have on his head the blood of a fellow-novelist. But there had been real danger, because it was not long before the dog had to be destroyed for attacking Mackenzie himself."

H. J. MASSINGHAM

WHENEVER I browse in a bookshop I find it hard to resist books about the countryside, especially if they are published in the gaily-jacketed series of Messrs. B. T. Batsford, Ltd. What a joy these books can be after a tiring day in the dusty city! I have over a dozen of them on my own bookshelves, and they never fail to console me when jaded spirits and frayed nerves have taken all the colour out of life. So I feel we must have a sketch of a "country" writer in this book.

Harold John Massingham was born in London—"within the sound of Bow Bells" in 1888. The family is of Norfolk origin. He was the eldest of six children, and was educated at Westminster School, where, he says, he was stuffed "like a Michaelmas goose" with the Classics. Although he resented the process, he put up with it, and it was not until his last day at school that he ventilated his feelings by kicking his resplendent top hat down the stairs from the top to the bottom.

He went to Oxford in 1906, choosing Queen's College because it was a fair distance from Christchurch, the destination of the majority of the other Westminster boys. During the first of his four years' residence he read History, but dropped it to take English literature. He loved that fair city, but in his autobiography, *Remembrance,* he complains "Oxford had lost faith even in its own learning, and I think that was one reason why it opposed so apathetic a resistance to the representative forces of the outer world, the land speculator, the suburban builder and the magnates of industry and of mass-production. It was Dr. Marett who taught me that I was wrong to see *only* this in the Oxford of 1906-10. There was still left a true humanism which I missed."

At this time he was a Freethinker, and was given exemption from morning chapel. Just as the Finals were about to start he was rushed off to an operation for appendicitis. It was not very successful, for he developed peritonitis immediately afterwards, and very nearly lost his life. His recovery, I might add, was truly remarkable, and the "history" of hte case was duly recorded in various medical journals. This, Mr. Massingham declares, was his first appearance in print!

During his convalescence in the country he grew to understand the

beauty of bird-life: "... I began to study birds for their own sakes, to distinguish one from another, to find their nests, to study their habits and to recognize their calls and songs. What a blessing this new acquaintance was to me cannot be told. It speedily ripened into a passion, and that in its turn hastened and extended the acquisition of knowledge. The desire to know, the feeling, the sympathy, went hand in hand with the gains in knowing; the more I got to know, the more I wanted to know, the more I knew." This was how he became such an ardent lover of the country; his great understanding of nature originated in his study of the humblest birds of the field and woodland: "... when I had become moderately proficient in detecting their songs, nests and ways, their orders and divisions, I moved my attention from the bird to the twig that nodded under it, from twig to tree, and tree to the ground that upheld it. I gathered a working knowledge of the wild flowers of my restricted walks, of the varieties of trees and bushes and a little of their ecological relations. So I came to look into the more elementary principles of biology and natural science."

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Mr. Massingham's first appointment in the literary world was on the staff of the *Morning Leader;* a job which lasted only for three weeks. Then he went to the National Press Agency, and worked with Sir John Squire, writing on the events of London life. He also began contributing to *The New Age,* Mr. A. R. Orage's brilliant journal. In 1913 he became the Assistant Editor of *The Athenaeum,* for which one of his principal tasks was book-reviewing. He produced chiefly "potted" reviews of a dozen lines or so, and recalls with horror the days when he was expected to "review" anything up to fifty books a week! No wonder our poor writers complain about the scrappy reviews of their books! I am reminded that a couple of years ago, Mr. H. G. Wells dedicated one of his books to the literary critics in this manner: "To the Reviewers; these pearls."

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Mr. Massingham is bitterly critical of the general muddle that followed the last war, and as I shall show later, he earnestly hopes that there will be no repetition of it when the present misery is over. Here is a very brief extract from his impressions (in *Remembrance)* of what happened last time: "The war went on, but underground, the war of exchanges, of fluctuating prices, of capital and labour, of

getting something out of nothing. The [4]conquest' of nature was intensified. Favourable fought with unfavourable trade balances. The moneylender bled the producer: cheap foreign food downed the good English stuff. Big Business swallowed little craftsmanship. The town invaded the country, the machine conquered man. Debt declared war on security, economics on life, finance on God.

*That vain low strife which makes men mad,
The tug for wealth and power,'

—creaked into action once more. How could it have been otherwise,, since strife is the thudding heart of modern civilization?"

Mr. Massingham's interest in bird-life caused him to be the founder of "The Plumage Group", an organization whose principal object was to get a Bill through Parliament to prohibit the use of wild birds' plumage by the milliners. The trade was particularly disgusting, on account of the methods employed in obtaining the feathers. He went to see Queen Mary to obtain her support, and eventually the Bill was passed.

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For many years Mr. Massingham was a contributor to *The Nation* before it was amalgamated with *The New Statesman.* He was also a member of the anthropological staff of University College, London, "with a kind of roving commission to prospect the upland homes of prehistoric man in England".

In more recent years he has spent much of his time in going about the country to study rural crafts, and he has gathered a remarkable amount of information, much of which can be found in his latest books. He has always emphasized the necessity of a healthy agriculture for the country, believing in yeoman farms (i.e. owner-occupied farms) rather than tenant farms. He deprecates the modern practice of "flogging" the earth with the aid of an excessive amount of chemical fertilizers, although he appreciates, of course, the need for the utmost yield in wartime. He is not enthusiastic about, the latest systems that tend to run farms on factory lines, with typically ruthless methods to obtain the maximum profit. This commercialization of agriculture, he declares, is apt to give the farmer an urban mentality, with the result that through trying to become an accountant and an industrialist, he gradually loses the great craft of husbandry. "Husbandry *is* craftsmanship, the sum of all craftsmanship, and to try and turn it into something else, a business among business,.

is the way to utter disaster. Farming is essentially a handcraft, as all crafts are, and that is why extreme mechanization and standardization lead only to the literal desert. A craft is always flexible, varied, individual, like life^ and self-sufficiency of mixed farming with all its subtle and delicate inter-relations gives the utmost scope to craftsmanship. The machine, as a farmer once said to me, 'takes the song out of the job'."

Mr. Massingham opposes the profit-making motive that exploits the part at the expense of the whole in agriculture, believing that subsidies for certain crops upset the necessary balance of farming Activity: ".. . the parts of a farm interlock to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts."

The systems which make up what we now call "Big Business" are injurious to the welfare of agriculture; and local marketing, Mr. Massingham declares, is being stifled by distribution of the chain-store type. "Our agricultural labourers are still lower in status and pay than the casual labourer, and even lower in both than the machine-minder in the factory. True, the nation in its stress and desperate need turns back to its own land as the prodigal son returned to his father. We return to our homeland, but not in penitence for our former outrage, but rather with a scurvy haste, a gadget mind and the old predatory outlook which sees dirt worth its weight in gold, not a living bounty to be thankfully received for what we give in service."

Mr. Massingham lives at Long Crendon, near Aylesbury; not far from the borders of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. He cultivates an acre of land, part garden and part orchard. "The garden melts into field, wood, hills, in barely perceptible gradations, and yet remains a garden." He grows a choice variety of roses; he keeps a pig and two geese, and has a devoted sheepdog named Friday. I envy him.

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As one would expect, Mr. Massingham's views on Reconstruction are chiefly concerned with the preservation of rural life and the protection of British agriculture against indiscriminate imports and detrimental exploitation. In *Field Fellowship* he says, "Farming lias been so consistently tricked, over-reached, over-trumped and then discarded by Big Business that it has evolved a kind of self-defensive mechanism which seeks to talk the jargon and pursue the methods of its urban masters even more 'efficiently' than they." He urges all farmers, yeomen, labourers and landlords "to sink their competitive

differences and unite in the cause of the land itself and that good husbandry of it in which all might play their part and have their share".

In the same book he attacks the system that allows the trader or distributor (i.e. the "middleman") to get "five times the profit in merely preparing and handing over the goods that the 'key-man' gets in growing them".

H. J. Massingham particularly deplores the modern practice of extracting most of the goodness from the wheat before it is made into bread, so that Big Business can make large profits by selling the extracted substances in the form of patent foods. If this is to be allowed to continue he suggests that the churches should adopt the more appropriate invocation "Give us this day our daily starch".

His publications include:

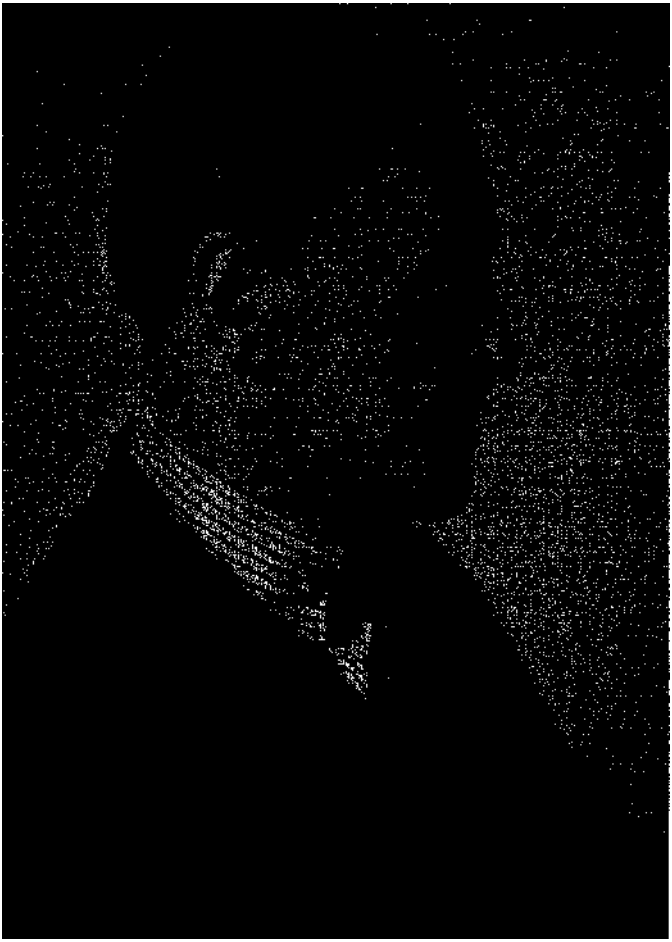
Wold Without End, Through the Wilderness, English Dozvnland, Country, Dctwnland Man, London Scene, Birds of the Sea-shore, A Treasury of Seventeenth-Century Verse, Untrodden Ways, Country Relics, The Heritage of Man, Cotswold Country, Chiltern Country, Genius of England, Shepherd's Country, A Countryman's Journal, The Sweet of the Year. The Fall of the Year, The English Countryman, The Tree of Life, Men of Earth, and *This Plot of Earth.*

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

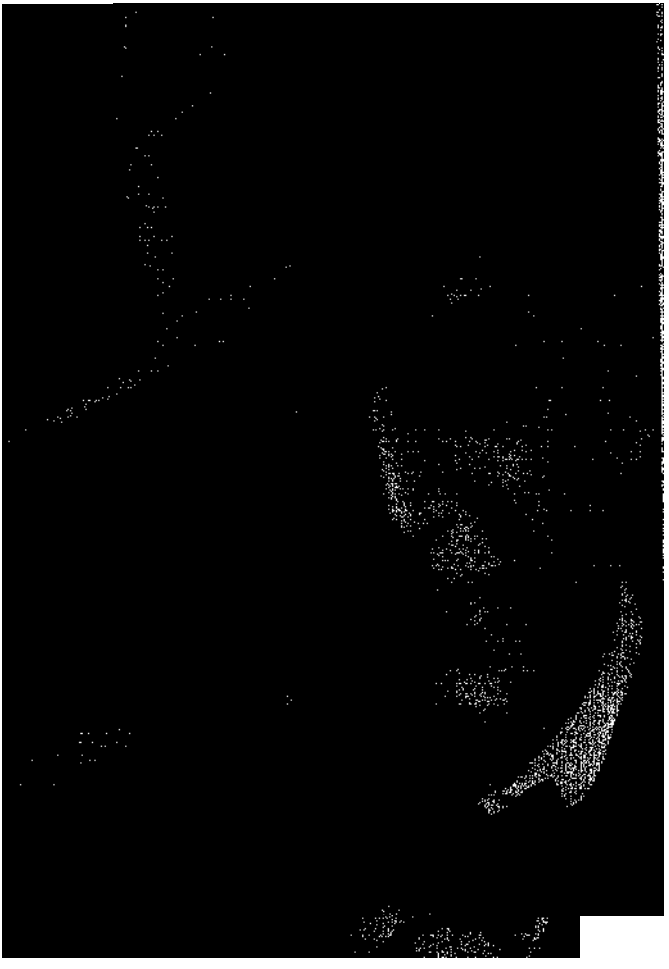
WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM is another of the "doctor-authors" who have enriched our modern literature witl'i the clear perceptions of scientific minds. When we consider the exceptional ability with which he weaves into his work all the varied experiences of his very active life, and his skilful portrayal of the more unpleasant and bitter realities of life, we can see why discriminating people frequently refer to him as "The English Maupassant".

He was born in Paris in 1874, the son of the solicitor to the British Embassy, and he received his early education at a small private school in*the vicinity. He was orphaned at the age of ten, and came to England to attend King's School, Canterbury; a shy, nervous boy afflicted with a stammer which did nothing to improve his English. The "stupid and irascible" schoolmasters showed him little sympathy; they were invariably impatient with him, and frequently resorted to bullying. A fair impression of his life at school may be found in his famous novel *Of Human Bondage,* in which the old Cathedral city appears as "Tercanbury". He was supposed to have* been under the care of a clerical uncle, but he Was miserable and lonely, and at the earliest possible opportunity he left school and went to Germany to study at Heidelberg University. When he returned to this country he refused to go to Cambridge, and instead entered St. Thomas's Hospital to train for the medical profession, chiefly because it afforded an opportunity to live in London. He declares that at first he was and unsatisfactory student, doing no more work than was necessary to scrape through the examinations. All his spare time was spent in reading and writing; and he took no part in the social life enjoyed by the other students, partly because his stammer often caused him embarrassment in company, but chiefly because he preferred to read in solitude, working systematically through English, French, Italian and Latin literature, history, science and philosophy.

As his medical course proceeded he found it much more interesting, and soon became engrossed in his work on the wards. He also had to attend confinements in the slums of Lambeth, where he came into contact with "life in the raw". In *The Summing Up* he tells us that in



Photograph by Howard Coster



Photograph by Olga Easwitz

A. A. Milne

those three years he must have witnessed pretty well every emotion of which man is capable. "It appealed to my dramatic instinct. . . . I saw how men died, I saw how they bore pain, I saw what hope looked like, fear and relief; I saw the dark lines that despair drew upon a face; I saw courage and steadfastness." It was this experience that enabled him to create *Liza of Lambeth,* his first novel, which was published in 1897. This sincere revelation of slum life in London as seen through the eyes of a young doctor made people realize—many of them for the first time—the enormity of the grim struggle of the very poor. It had been written in the evenings after he had toiled all day in the hospital, and although it lacked the style and dramatic qualities of his later works, it sold well, and a second edition was called for within a month of publication. A sermon was preached about it in Westminster Abbey.

The success of this first novel made him decide to forsake medicine, and at the age of twenty-three he started writing professionally. His royalties were barely sufficient to live on, so he took stock of his literary abilities* and came to the conclusion that as he was more adept at dialogue than narrative, he should try to write for the stage as well. He encountered irritating difficulties with many of the theatre managers; some said his plays were too gloomy, and others considered 1:hat they contained insufficient action. Those who could not give intelligent reasons for rejecting them simply excused themselves by saying that his work was "uncommercial". How often the young -dramatist hears those criticisms! Many of them have become convinced that there is a "freemasonry" among theatre managers, and those playwrights who do not know its secrets are for ever excluded. But Maugham persevered with boundless faith in his own skill, and in 1903 had the satisfaction of seeing *A Man of Honour* in the producer's hands. This and *Mrs. Craddock,* his second novel, which had appeared in the previous year, brought him public recognition—but chiefly as a writer of pessimistic and rather cynical views, and he ^remained in that category until his later comedies proved that he was •equally skilful in the witty portrayal of more pleasant subjects. *Lady Frederick,* which was put on at the Court Theatre in 1907, was one of the first of his comedies to impress the public. It ran for 422 performances and banished the spectre of financial anxiety for ever. Soon -after that he had three plays running in London in one year.

Of Human Bondage, which was published in 1915, is generally considered to be his finest novel. It is not autobiographical, although anany of his personal experiences are recorded in it, particularly in

his description of Philip's training in a London hospital. It sold in very large numbers, as did also its successor, *Tlie Moon and Sixpence,* a tale of the South Seas, which appeared, in 1919.

Ashenden, a story of work in the Secret Service, is based on his experiences during the Great War, when he served as a British Agent. "The work appealed both to my sense of romance and my sense of the ridiculous. The methods I was instructed to use in order to foil persons who were following me; the secret interviews with agents in unlikely places, the conveying of messages in a mysterious fashion; the smuggling of reports over a frontier—it was all doubtless very necessary, but so reminiscent of what was then known as the shilling shocker that for me it took most of its reality away from the war, and I could not but look upon it as little more than material that might one day be of use to me." Quite recently Goebbels denounced the book in one of his acrimonious speeches on the German radio! Mr. Maugham's work for the Intelligence Department took him to Switzerland and Russia, and when he returned his health broke down completely, and he was compelled to live an invalid's life for two years. His recovery, though slow, was complete, and he has since travelled constantly in all parts of the world, gaining experiences which have never failed to supply him with ample material for his books and plays. He has always had far more stories in his head than he has ever had time to write.

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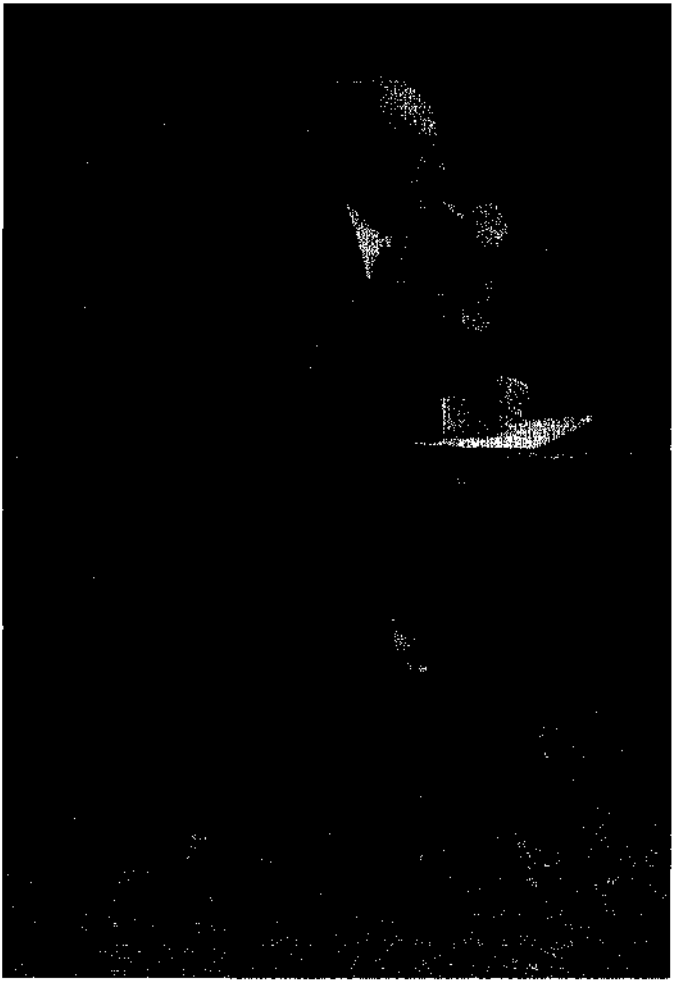
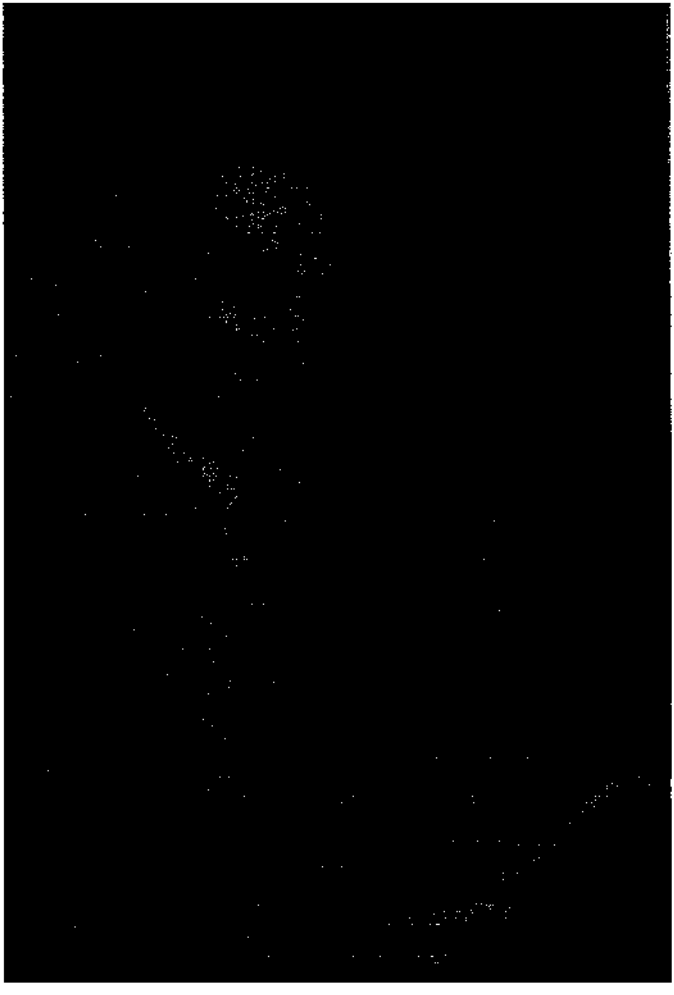
Mr. Maugham is a man of medium height, with a tanned complexion and unusually dark brown eyes. He talks as he writes, very concisely and to the point, with delightfully quick-witted repartee. One of his pet aversions is the type of author, well-fed and in comfortable circumstances, who writes in precious strains upon the moral value of suffering and poverty. His own experiences have taught him that suffering degrades man rather than ennobles him, and makes him selfish, mean, petty and suspicious. He considers that a few years in the medical profession is the finest possible training for a writer who seeks to portray human nature.

When the present war was declared he was living at his handsome white house, Villa Mauresque, which he had bought and remodelled twelve years before, on a pleasant hillside at Cap Ferrat. It stood in delightful grounds containing a marble swimming pool surrounded by cypresses and olive trees, through which the Mediterranean could be seen glittering in the sun. He had been very happy there, and hoped



R. H, Mottram



J. Mlddle.ton Murry

to spend his last days in peaceful retirement, writing an occasional book when the fancy moved him. The Ministry of Information soon got into touch with him arid asked him to write a series of articles on the attitude of the French people towards their British allies, so he made a long tour of observation in France, which is described in detail in his interesting book *Strictly Personal.* He found that the French were very disgruntled at the size of the British Expeditionary Force, and were profoundly shocked at the levity of our men. In the evacuated areas of Alsace Lorraine the homes which had been left to the care of the French soldiers had been ruthlessly looted by both oNicers and men, and there was appalling corruption among the high officials.

From the vivid accounts given by Mr. Maugham in this book it •* all too evident that the French were not only absurdly over-confident, but were already planning what they were going to do with Germany when she capitulated. Private interests always came first, and everybody was trying to make money out of the war.

When France fell, Mr. Maugham, with a host of other refugees, had to travel back to England in a very dirty collier. Food was short. no water was available for washing, coal dust penetrated everywhere, they were constantly in danger of submarine attacks, and some of the passengers went out of their minds.

After a short stay in this country, during which he experienced the worst of the air-raids on London, he went to America, and he has now settled in South Carolina. His new home in Yemasee was built for him by his American publisher, and he lives there alone with Max, his spaniel. In the grounds he has a wooden cabin converted into a study so that he can work in silence. It contains little else but a table, chair and his books. His chief recreation now is fishing, but he frequently entertains his friends at informal parties, when the favourite card game is Rummy.

His more recent books are:

Cakes and Ale (1930), *First Person Singular* (1931), *The Narrow Corner* (1932), *Ah King* (1933), *Altogether* (1934), *Don Fernando* (1935), *Cosmopolitans* (1986), *Theatre* (1937), *The Summing Up* (1938), *Christmas Holiday* (1939), *The Mixture as Before* (1940), *Up at the Villa* (1941), *Strictly Personal* (1942), and *The Razor's Edge* (1944).

PLAYS.—*The Constant Wife* (1927), *The Sacred Flame* (1929), *The Breadwinner* (1930), *For Services Rendered* (1932), *Sheppey* (1933), *Home and Beauty* (first produced at the Playhouse in 1919)—has recently been revived in London.

A. A. MILNE

A MAN who can contribute to innumerable magazines, write several books of amusing light articles, three volumes of essays, four novels, an excellent detective story, a book of verse, four delightful books for children, and in the same lifetime establish a reputation as a dramatist, certainly deserves our attention.

Alan Alexander Milne, who is sixty-one, is one of three brothers. He was born at Henley House School, Kilburn, of which his father was proprietor and head master, and received his early education there. It is interesting to note that H. G. Wells came to the school as a science master when Milne was a boy, and the latter still remembers the botany lessons he gave. In *IVs Too Late Now* Mr. Milne considers that Wells was too clever and too impatient to be a schoolmaster, and adds that he contributed to the School Magazine "in which fora year or two he kicked and stretched himself, before jumping, fully waked, into the world of letters". This magazine, by the way, was started in 1881 by Alfred Harms worth, who was then a boy at the school.

Mr. Milne in due course passed from Henley House to Westminster School, where, according to his autobiography, the education was a great deal better than the food. He declares: "In all my years at Westminster I never ceased to be hungry." Out of the small allowance for expenses made to him by his father he bought biscuits and other comparatively appetizing forms of food at the school shop; a practice which necessitated certain adjustments in the accounts upon which his father insisted. This, Mr. Milne tells us, was child's play: "Father couldn't know if a master had been married that term, and wouldn't know if a Canon, minor Canon or What-not had died that term; nor could he be dogmatic about the subscription likely to be demanded from each boy on these glad or sad occasions. 'Wreaths 15s., Wedding Presents I7s. 6d.' looked reasonable. Ken called our system the double-entry system because we entered every expense twice, and he said that all accountants used it because it was a very good and well-tried system,"

He started writing when he was still at school, collaborating with his brother in the production of light verse, and contributing to *The Elizabethan,* the Westminster School Magazine. His chief reason for

going to Cambridge was that he had made up his mind to edit *The Oranta;* an ambition eventually fulfilled against the wishes of his tutor, who thought that his "legitimate" work would inevitably suffer neglect. Some of his contributions to that journal were noticed by a member of the staff of *Punch,* who wrote expressing his interest .and inviting him to contribute a series of sketches. Mr. Milne obliged, but his efforts on this occasion were not accepted.

His father, whose school had prospered and moved to Westgate, hoped he would enter the Civil Service or become a schoolmaster, but Milne had already set his heart upon a literary career, and when he came down from Cambridge he took two rooms in Bouverie Street And started writing as a free-lance. Those were hard days, for although he had renewed his acquaintance with I I . G. Wells and had received advice from several prominent figures in the literary world, his progress was slow. The first article he sold went to *Vanity Fair* for fifteen shillings. He made repeated attempts to appear in *Punch,* but week after week his contributions dropped back into his own letter-box, until at last a few sets of verse were accepted. They brought him exactly 15s. 6d.!

At the end of his first year as a journalist his total earnings amounted only to £20, and as he had exhausted the financial help his father had given him, he sought cheaper rooms in Chelsea, aud returned to his work with even greater determination. The number of rejections gradually diminished, and one day he received an invitation from the *Evening News* to write a regular article once a week, so that by the end of the second year his earnings had risen to £120.

Then came what seemed to be an incredible stroke of luck: in 1906 he was offered the Assistant-Editorship of *Punch* at £250 a year. This was most gratifying; not only did it bring him into touch with many of the people he wanted to know, but it gave him valuable experience and a regular market for those amusing light-hearted contributions which so frequently slipped off his pen. After four years he published a collection of his *Punch* articles in a book called *A Day's Play.*

In June 1913 he married Miss Dorothy (Daphne) de Selincourt, and took a flat in Embankment Gardens, Chelsea.

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The Great War turned him into a dramatist. Early in 1914 he wrote a one-act play called *Make Believe* which he sent as a "curtain-raiser" to Granville Barker, who immediately recognized talent in it

R. H. MOTTRAM

I AM afraid this sketch is going to be rather a brief one, not because I wish it to be so, but because I have only a limited amount of information to convey to the reader. If 1 were a very persistent individual, I have no doubt that I could persuade Mr. Mottram to supplement it considerably; but I have a feeling that he would do so rather reluctantly, for he has enjoyed a quiet life, and I believe he is not over-anxious to make a song about it. So I am going to be content with a comparatively small slice of Mr. Mottram's pie.

Ralph Hale Mottram was born in Norwich on October 30, 1883, and lived over Gurney's Bank, of which his father was the manager. His parents were broad-minded Nonconformists. One of his earliest memories is a visit to Norwich by Edward V I I when he was Prince of Wales, which he describes with other scenes of his childhood in his *Autobiography with a Difference,* published in 1938.

He was educated at a local private school, and later at Lausanne in Switzerland. As a youth he worked in his father's bank, but unlike many authors, has no bitter memories of his experiences in commerce. He served in the Army from 1914 to 1919, spending much of his time in Flanders acting as an interpreter, as he possessed a wide knowledge of the French language, and spoke it fluently in a manner easily understood by the peasants in whose locality his battalion was serving.

When he was demobilized, he returned to the bank, and began writing in his spare time, chiefly for his own satisfaction, as he never bothered about trying to get his earliest efforts published. In 1924 his first novel, *The Spanish Farm,* was accepted for publication. At first it sold slowly; then it was suddenly awarded the Hawthornden Prize, and in a week it became a best-seller. During the two ensuing years he added two more volumes to it, making *The Spanish Farm* ***Trilogy,***

Much of his experience of banking in Norwich and of the commercial life of that city went into his next novel, *Our Mr. Dormer,* which appeared in 1927. Once again, his sales were very gratifying, and he decided to leave the bank to become a professional novelist. His latest books are: *Time to he Going* (1937), *Success to the Mayor* (1937), *Old England* (1937), *There was a Jolly Miller* (1938), *Trader's*

Bream (1939), *Miss Lavington* (1939), *Bowler Hat* (1940), *The Ghost and the Maiden* (1941), *The World Turns Slowly Round* (1942), and *The Corbells at War* (1943).

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Mr. Mottram is passionately fond of his native county, and is proud of his Norfolk accent. He prefers to acquire knowledge of life from the people around him rather than from books. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, but he does not go out of his way to seek the company of other writers, in fact he has always kept out of the fashionable literary circles. He is married, and has two sons and a daughter.

He has a very real interest in the theatre, which probably originated in the little toy theatre he had as a child. In his autobiography he says: "No book, no music, nothing, can give me the thrill I experience when, before a hurriedly 'hushing' audience, the curtain goes up and the opening scene is 'discovered'. Very often I enjoy the performance. But I look in vain for just that illusion that I used to get from a few cardboard figures jerking woodenly about in the flickering murky light of cut-down candles, while the unemotional voice of my cousin delivered the 'Unhand me!' and 'Look to yourself, Caitiff!' lines." As a boy he was taken to the Theatre Royal, Norwich, where he saw such people as Irving and Ellen Terry. He is inclined to think that little has been gained by the use of all the modern contrivances that have been lavished upon the stage in recent years, because people are now going to the theatre in a more passive state of mind than they did in the old days when a great deal more was demanded of their imaginations. Even if I do not entirely agree with him, I can see Mr. Mottram's point, which becomes quite apparent when one compares the diligence of the average theatre audience with the way in which the cinema audience listens to the dialogue bawled at it through the powerful loud-speakers behind the screen. Incidentally, his book *The Spanish Farm* was made into a film.

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In reply to my enquiry concerning his views on the problems of post-war Reconstruction, Mr. Mottram said: "I say to my boys when they come home on leave 'Do not expect too much'. The Beveridge Report is excellent, and we, the small professional people and upper-grade wage-earners, will have to pay for it, not some imaginary 'rich' or 'landlords'. Taxation is now so organized that no one will be very 'rich' in the old sense again."

J. MIDDLETON MURRY

THE majority of my older readers will probably think of Mr. J. Middleton Murry in association with Katharine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence, but personally I think we should consider him now more as a leader of a class of intellectuals who have strongly influenced the younger generation of writers. In more recent days we have seen him as a pacifist, clinging to his ideals in a rather unsympathetic world, which cannot, however, dispute his sincerity, because he is above the age for conscription, and if he had not adopted his present attitude towards the war he could easily have obtained one of those highly-paid war-time appointments that the more energetic drum-beaters obtain for themselves in the security of inland health resorts.

He was born of poor parents in 1889 in Peckham, London, his mother being only nineteen years of age at the time, and he was brought up in an environment of perpetual economy, for his father held only an impecunious temporary clerkship at Somerset House. At the tender age of 2½he was sent to an infants' class at a gloomy Board school near the Old Kent Road, and apparently became something of an infant prodigy as far as elementary education is concerned. His progress through the school was meteoric, for in an amazingly short time he was in a class for boys four or five years his senior. This was evidently due to the continual pressure applied by his father, who had become obsessed with ambition by his associations with men in secure and comparatively affluent positions. The poor boy was never given a moment's rest; his father was continually cramming him with arithmetic and other primary subjects, allowing him no respite even on Sundays, and repeatedly emphasizing the necessity of winning a scholarship. Fortunately for his peace of mind, he was successful in obtaining a free place at Christ's Hospital, which at that time was still in Newgate Street. He started there in January 1901, and subsequently moved with the school to Horsham, where he found unbounded happiness in freedom from his father's enthusiasm. (You will observe that he is one of the few writers who are not abusive about the schools in which they were educated). He was unhappy only when he had to return home during the holidays to endure lengthy catechisms upon his scholastic progress.

He won another scholarship to Brasenose College, Oxford, but his

University career was in many ways a disappointment. He achieved little until his third year, when with Michael Sadleir he founded an advanced magazine called *Rhythm.* Under his editorship, it enjoyed a small but very select circulation, and received the support of many prominent writers. Through it he came into contact with Katharine Mansfield, whom he afterwards married, but the magazine soon became a burden as the business side of it had been neglected, and he suddenly found himself heavily in debt with the printers. At one time he was obliged to sell his possessions to meet his creditors, and lie was reduced to living with his wife in one room in Chancery Lane, with the most meagre furnishings imaginable. Their position remained very unstable for several years, for although Mr. Murry contributed regularly to the *Westminster Gazette* and later became one of its literary critics in the company of Walter de la Mare and J. D. Bercsford, his income was always fluctuating. Moreover, they were for ever on the move; as soon as they became settled in a flat, cottage or oflice, a change of circumstances forced them to relinquish it.

His principal assignment in the *Westminster Gazette* was an omnibus weekly column, but he also contributed frequently as an art critic. This led to his appointment as Literary Correspondent of *The Times Literary Supplement,* with which he was associated for a number of years.

His first book was a critical study of Dostoevsky, which he wrote for Martin Seeker, to whom he was indebted for financial assistance given towards the maintenance of *Rhythm.* During the last few months of its life, the name of this paper was changed to *The Blue Review.*

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Soon after the outbreak of the Great War, Mr. Murry volunteered for the Army, but was rejected for the more active forms of service on account of his physical unfitness. A friendly colonel, appreciating his education and ability to speak many foreign languages, wrote on his behalf to a Member of Parliament, with the result that he was given an appointment in the Intelligence Department of the War Office. His propensity for hard work earned him rapid promotion, and by 1919 he had become Chief Censor, having for two or three years edited the *Daily Review of the Foreign Press.* He received the O.B.E. in 1920.

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After the war, he became editor of *The Athenamm,* but his career

was interrupted by the illness of his wife, who had to be taken to the Riviera. Her death, which occurred soon after, was a severe blow to him, for she had given him untiring assistance in his work.

He became a regular contributor to *The Nation,* and in 1923 founded *The Adelphi.* More recently he has become associated with the Peace Pledge Union, acting as Editor of its newspaper, *Peace News.*

Here are some of his books:

Still Life (1917), *Poems* (1919), *The Evolution of an Intellectual* (1920), *Aspects of Literature* (1920), *The Things We Are* (1922), *The Voyage* (1924), *Keats and Shakespeare* (1925), *Life of Jesus* (1926), *Things to Come* (1928), *God* (1929), *Son of Woman* (1931), *The Necessity of Communism* (1932), *William Blake* (1933), *Life of Katharine Mansfield* (1933), *Between Two Worlds* (1934), *Shakespeare* (1936), *The Necessity of Pacifism* (1937), *Heaven and Earth* (1938), *The Price of Leadership* (1939), *The Defence of Democracy* (1939), *Europe in Travail* (1940), *The Betrayal of Christ by the Churches* (1940), *Christocraq/* (1942), and *Adam and Eve* (1944).

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Today, apart from various literary activities, Mr. Murry runs a "community-farm" near Diss, Norfolk, where he and his friends are trying to live in accordance with their ideals. For the past seven or eight years he has been primarily concerned with "educating people into community", and with "all manner of humble and practical experiments in a new way of living". He told me recently that experiments of this kind, if they can make good, seem to him the only way of renewing and maintaining the tradition of personal, responsible freedom against the constant encroachment of the centralized, bureaucratic and essentially totalitarian State.

"My pacifism was reached by a somewhat unusual path," Mr. Murry tells me. "Though I have been for many years something of a Christian Socialist—Christian Communist would be nearer the mark—I did not become a complete pacifist until the time of the Spanish Civil War. Then it became quite evident to me that revolutionary socialism which accepted methods ot violence and terrorism must in the end be self-defeating; and that any party which hoped to achieve a society of human brotherhood must itself be a brotherhood. You cannot get an inwardly peaceful society by methods of violence. In a word: the means will always determine the quality of the end."

Mr. Murry is in favour of the Beveridge plan, provided that its importance is not exaggerated. "Being where and what we are, it is **probably** the **best we** can **do: but to** my **mind it** is merely **a super-**

ficial salve applied to a far more deep-seated disease. It may be the best form of totalitarianism; but it is essentially totalitarian." He believes that a real social revolution must be quite differently conceived: "I do not believe that any radical amelioration is possible at the national level, nor by any centralized regulation of the mass-society. Real regeneration must come from below. The hope for the future lies in decentralization, not centralization: in local autonomy, and local community."

He is afraid that this country will probably have to endure more regimentation and much more disillusion before his views commend themselves to more than a tiny minority. Nevertheless, he believes that they will make headway after the war, and in that hope he is still continuing the publication of *The Adelphi,* in which for more than twenty years he has expounded and explored what he admits to be his "unpopular philosophy".

Mr. Murry tells me that he has no faith whatever in the "modern industrial mass-society", believing that it moves unconsciously but inevitably towards war, no matter what label it boars: Communist, Fascist or Democratic, "The influence of mass-industrialism itself is infinitely greater than that of the political labels which the mass-society may wear. Until we learn that the enemy is the mass-society itself and the mentality that is inseparable from it, there will be no real salvation."

JOHN COWPER POWYS

I OFTEN wonder if young librarians get confused with the Powys family. J. C. Powys has three brothers who also write: Llewelyn Powys, A. R. Powys, and T. F. Powys, the author of such novels as *Black Bryony* (1923), *Innocent Birds* (1926), *Mr, Weston's Good Wine* (1928), *The White Paternoster* (1930), *Unclay* (1931), *Captain Patch* (1935), and *Goat Green* (1937). Then there is Philippa Powys, their sister, who wrote *Blackthorn Winter* and other novels, and who has also published a considerable amount of poetry. Their mother, I must also add, came of the family that produced William Cowper and John Donne.

A most interesting biography of the Powys family entitled *Welsh Ambassadors* has been written by Louis Marlow (Chapman & Hall), so 1 think it will suffice if in my book the family is represented by John Cowper Powys, philosopher, novelist, poet and lecturer. He was born at Shirley, Derbyshire, on October 8, 1872, son of the Rev. C. F. Powys. He was the eldest of eleven children; a rather dreamy, emotional, sensitive boy whose chief delight was in walking in the lovely hills and dales for which that Midland county is famous.

He was educated at Sherborne, where his one consolation was the excellent school library housed iri a fine mediaeval building. He can still remember the deep window seats with their comfortable soft Jcather cushions where he used to sit for hours poring over books while all the other boys were at play. His love for books amounted almost to an obsession in his childhood.

With the intention of offering himself for ordination,, he went to •Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, but soon found that he had no real vocation for the Church. He took an honours degree in History, but was still undecided about his career when he left the University, and it was but a mere chance that he called at the offices of a firm of scholastic agents in town one day when there happened to be a vacancy for a lecturer in German at Brighton, who was required to do part-time duty in two or three of the local girls' schools. He applied immediately, and although the authorities were a trifle taken aback at his youthful appearance, he was given the post. As he had to be within fairly easy reach of Brighton, he found lodgings at the little town of Southwick.

It was soon after his appointment to Brighton that he published his first book of verse called *Odes and other Poems.* Of these, one was addressed to W. B. Yeats and another to Thomas Hardy. Powys now looks upon this little book as a collection of rather immature efforts; yet W. B. Yeats wrote him "a lengthy and most excited letter" in acknowledgment, while Hardy wrote and invited Powys to go and see him! He went, very conscious of the honour, and the great novelist showed him the manuscript of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and presented him with a paper edition of the book.

J. C. Powys gave his first public lecture in Hove Town Hall. It was on the subject of English literature, and was heard by an audience of three women and a child. The "box office" receipts on that occasion were precisely 3s. 6d.

Additional work in one or two schools in Eastbourne enabled him to earn sufficient money to keep a wife, and after finding a pleasant old farmhouse called Court House, he married Margaret Alice Lyon, of Middlecot, South Devon.

He gave up his school appointments when he became an Extension Lecturer for Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities. He travelled extensively in France, Germany, Spain and Italy, and then went to America where he spent many years in lecturing to every conceivable type of audience from coast to coast. He found the United States the ideal country for "mystagogues, demagogues, thaumaturgic preachers, theosophic illuminants, occultists, conjurers, table-turners, mediums, Chatauqua-culturists, Utopians, Shakers, Mormons, Second Adventists, East Indian Yogists, Red Indian 'Controls', worshippers of Quetzacoatle, worshippers of Munibo Jumbo, new-thoughtists, psychists, psycho-analysts, psychiatrists, psycho-careerists, not to speak of tclcportists, telepathists and televisionists!"

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He was in America when the last war broke out. He says that at that time the American youth was on the crest of a wave of passionate idealism, while the middle aged were passionate in their selfishness. In his *Autobiography* he says: "The idealism showed itself principally in two ways; in liberal humanitarian propaganda, and in such an outburst of poetry as no nation had seen since the Elizabethan age in England. Upon both these lovely and gracious growths the cloven hoof of the war crushed down with exterminating violence. ... I felt in both the moral and aesthetic aspects of this new creative wave a return to the spirit of Walt Whitman."

Mr. Powys returned to this country early in 1918 at the same time us the American troops were being brought over. He offered himself for active service, but was rejected on physical grounds.

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Among the many books published by John Cowper Powys we find several novels: *Wood and Stone, Rodmoor, Ducdame, Wolf Solent* and *Maiden Castle;* and important philosophical works including *The Complex Vision, The Religioii of a Sceptic, Visions and Revisions, Suspended Judgments, Tlw Meaning of Culture,* and *In Defence of Sensuality.* His latest books are: *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933), *A Philosophy of Solitude* (1933), *Autobiography* (1934), *Jobber Skald* (1935), *The Art of Happiness* (1935), *Maiden Castle* (1936), *Morwyn* (1937), *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938), *Owen Glendower* (1941), *Mortal Strife* (1941), and *The Art of Growing Old* (1943).

Mr. Powys considers Dostocvsky to be as superior to all other novelists as Shakespeare is to all other dramatists. He is also very fond of the works of Walter Pater, Henry James and Dorothy Richardson.

He is tall and gaunt, a man of dignified and striking appearance. In America most people took it for granted that he was an artist, and he frequently had the unique experience of hearing street urchins calling out "Shakespeare!" as he went past.

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When I wrote to him (he is living in Wales at the moment) about this book he sent me a very charming reply, which I am reproducing •with the exception of the irrelevant first part:

> ... As to your excellent questions about the new order, I am too absorbed in reading over and over for my own private culture, certain poetical and philosophical books; and in writing romances and lay-sermons and psychological-moralistic hand-books for individuals of my own rather anarchistic and rather solitude-loving type (with a mania for the inanimate and for the elements) to be anything but ignorant about world economics and politics.
>
> But on two or three special and quite particular topics I do feci *very strongly* and in fact am both an ardent missionary and a fierce crusader. I will put these down in the order in which I feel their importance:
>
> 1. I would like to see the abolition of Vivisection and the dis-

crediting and total debunking of the present fantastic tyranny of physical science.

2. I would like to see the complete destruction of the Franco Rdgime in Spain; and the establishment of Catalonia as an independent commonwealth with anarchistic tendencies.

3. I would like to see a very complete but entirely bloodless revolution all over the world by which distinctions of class and inequalities of property and money were brought to an end without the suppression of free thought, free speech, free press, free books, free discussion and free art.

4. I would like to see Big Business and Capitalistic Private Initiative threatened and taxed and harried and bludgeoned into good behaviour; but I would like to see sufficient individualism left to stop the government from becoming a Dictatorship.

5. I would like to see the nationalization of land, mines, water, electricity, railways, and above all of BANKS.

6. 1 would like the attainment by the manual workers of those values of freedom from worry, of personal leisure, of liberal education, of development of individual taste, of love of solitude, etc., etc., which we associate with the best aristocracies: in fact I would like to see a general *levelling up.*

7. I would like to see some scheme invented by which all men and women in all communities *were forced to share in the business of government;* and forced to learn how to take such a share!

8. I would like religion kept out of the schools, and out of education altogether; and left entirely to private *initiative.*

Hoping, my dear Mr. Donald Brook, that these notes will be of use to your projected book; and apologizing for my inability to type them or to get them typed,

Yours very sincerely,

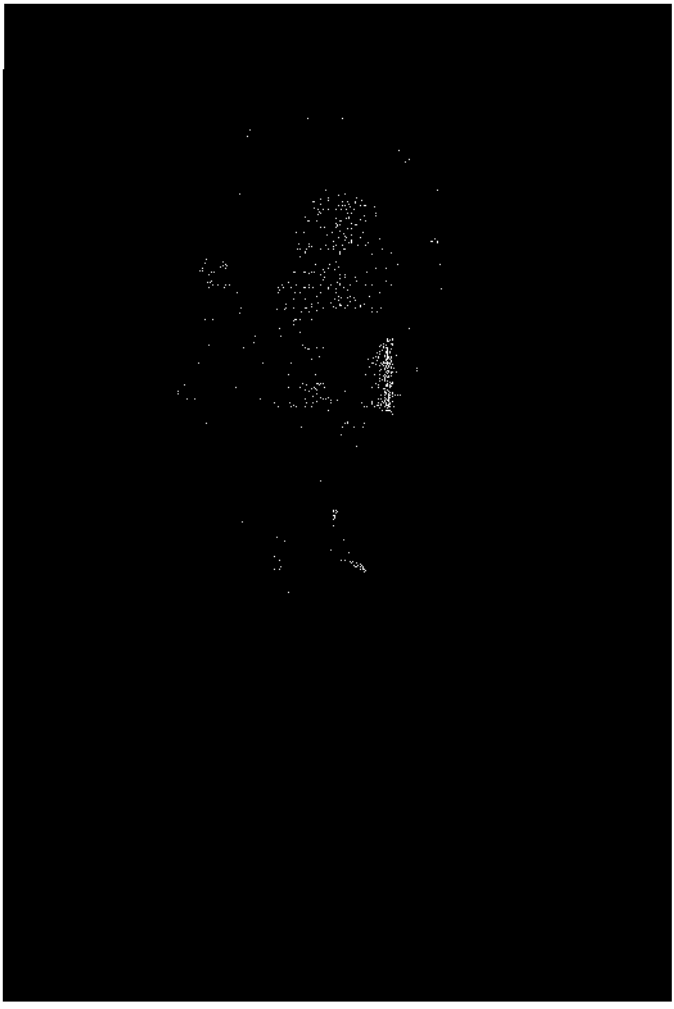
JOHN COWPER POWYS.

J. B. PRIESTLEY

THE name of J. B. Priestley has become almost a household word in the English language. When he broadcast his famous Postscripts on those memorable Sunday evenings in 1940, thousands who had never read his books or seen his plays realized that here was a man who understood the feelings of the people, and who had the courage to tell the bureaucrats and reactionaries just how their stupidity and humbug were impeding the nation's struggle for existence. How that frank, homely Yorkshire voice roused us in those perplexing days!

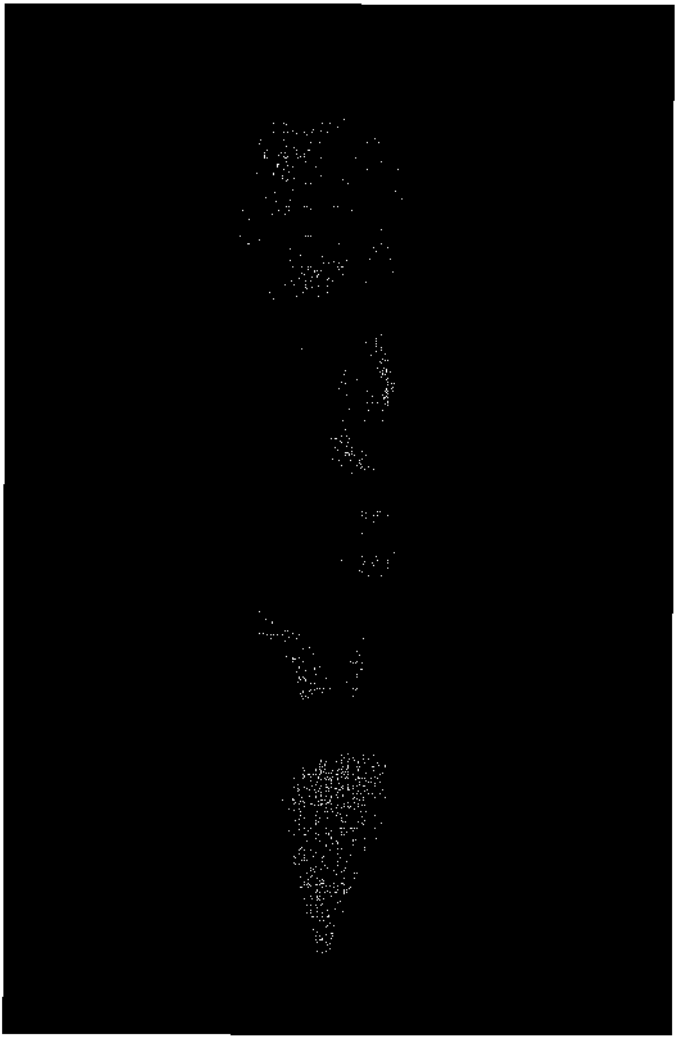
John Boynton Priestley was born in 1894 in Bradford, where his father was a schoolmaster. He received his early education in the same city and on leaving school went into a local olfice to learn the wool trade. He gives us some interesting facts about those early days in the Introduction to the *Everyman* edition of *Angel Pavement*-. "At that time 1 was trying in rather a dreamy fashion to learn how to export wool, tops and noils from Bradford ... to the continent. Looking back at myself in that office, which hummed with the reek of our East Indian wool samples, I can see now that I cannot have been worth very much, but I can hardly believe that 1 was worth even less than 1 received." He had very little money to spend in those days, and found that he could afford to buy books only by drastically economizing on his lunches. "In a shop in the covered market", he tells us, "you could buy a bag of stale buns for tuppence. That was one way of doing it. Another was to buy from a Health Food shop a heayy slab of some mysterious nut sandwich for about threepence, and wash it down with plenty of water. This nut stuff neither tickled nor satisfied the appetite, it merely destroyed the appetite, murdered it with a blunt instrument." By this means he managed to collect a small library of his own, and he still has in his possession some of the shilling *Everyman* volumes of poetry obtained by these gastronormeal sacrifices.

In *Bain upon Godshill,* one of his more recent books, we are told that in his youth he was "one of a group of lively intelligent lads who puffed their shiny new pipes at each other, walked the moors and dropped in here and there for a manly half-pint of bitter, and argued about life and literature until the moon fell out of the sky".



Photograph by Strand Film Co., Ltd.

J. 5. Priestley



Photograph by courtesy of the " Nottingham Journal "

Cecil Roberts

He began to write soon after he left school, and at the age of sixteen succeeded in selling an article to a London newspaper for one guinea. This modest success at the start was a powerful incentive to strive for greater things, and it was not long before he was contributing with some degree of regularity to various newspapers—chiefly socialist ones.

At the outbreak of war he joined the army as a private with the rest of his friends, most of whom were killed in one day at the Battle of Loos in 1916. Later, he was commissioned, and served in the Duke of Wellington's and Devonshire Regiments. He was wounded three times.

He went to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1919, where his literary ability developed rapidly. He took honours in English Literature, Modern History and Political Science, and did a considerable amount of coaching for his college. He became well known in the literary circles of the University, and was soon contributing articles, essays and book reviews to the more intellectual journals. His quick, warm sense of humour made him extremely popular.

It was at this time that he published *Brief Diversions,* a little volume of parodies, and *Papers from Lilliput,* a book of essays.

When he left Cambridge he became a reader for a large firm of publishers, and shortly afterwards wrote another book of essays entitled *I for One* which made a favourable impression upon many of the critics. He began to write regularly for the *London Mercury,* and also became a book reviewer for the *Daily News,* besides publishing several volumes of responsible criticism from time to time, including *Figures in Modern Literature, The English Comic Characters, George Meredith, Peacock, The English Novel* and *English Humour.* In addition to this considerable achievement, he published two excellent volumes of essays in 1927, *Talking* and *Open House;* and edited a collection of amusing passages from English literature which he called *Fools and Philosophers.* The same year saw the appearance of his first novel, *Adam in Moonshine,* followed soon afterwards by *Benighted.*

His first great success was *Tlie Good Companions,* a novel which appeared in 1929. Its sales were enormous, and it caused the entire reading public of this country to realize that another great author had "arrived". After collaborating with his friend Hugh Walpole in the writing of a humorous story, *Farthing Hall,* he published in the following year *Angel Pavement,* another best seller, which is generally considered to be his finest book. "Though I was once in an office

myself for a time" he declares in the introduction to the later *Everyman* edition, "there is no autobiographical element in *Angel Pavement.* I have never lived or worked in the City of London, and actually know very little about it. ... I wish I knew more about business life, because I should certainly write more about-it." Later, he tells us that if he had written this novel in 1937, he would have been unable to preserve what he calls his "certain air of detachment". "I should tend now to stress the heart-breaking dependence of these decent people upon a rotten system. I could not help doing this, because I find now even an apparent air of detachment almost impossible to attain. The reason is of course that our contemporary world problems have such a terrible urgency; and it is my experience that no writer with a considerable public is allowed to forget the existence of such problems for a single morning, even if he could forget them when left to himself."

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In the short space available in this little book it is quite impossible to include even brief reviews of his works, but I must add a few words about *The Good Companions* and *Angel Pavement* before I pass on to the more personal aspect of this sketch. I believe that the tremendous success of these two books is due to the following reasons: they are both original, thoroughly entertaining, soundly constructed and written in sincerity. Their characters are commonplace, and come to life in the reader's imagination without conscious effort upon his part. The narrative is written in a delightfully easy and friendly style; he tells his stories just as if he were sitting in an armchair at your side. You can almost smell his pipe in some of his books. Consider for a moment how he takes you along Angel Pavement telling you rather confidentially about the occupants of the shabby business premises in that little side-street: "This door has no name upon it, and nobody . . . has seen it open or knows what there is behind it. There it is, a door, and it does nothing but gather dust and cobwebs and occasionally drop another flake of dried paint on the worn step below. Perhaps it leads into another world. Perhaps it will open, one morning, to admit an angel, who, after looking up and down the little street for a moment, will suddenly blow the last trumpet. Perhaps that is why it is called Angel Pavement."

His most recent books are *Midnight on the Desert* and *Rain upon GodshiU* (both autobiographical), *Let the People Sing* (1939; the first new novel ever to be broadcast before publication), *Out of the People*

<1941), *Blackout in Gretley* (1942), and *Daylight on Saturday* (1943), which is a long novel about an aircraft factory.

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The theatre has always made an irresistible appeal to J. B. Priestley, and it is therefore not at all surprising that having established himself as a novelist, he should try his skill as a playwright. In this new sphere of work he scored an even greater success. *Dangerous Corner,* first produced in 1932, played to packed houses, and was quickly followed by *The Roundabout* and *Laburnum Grove.* All of these are still performed from time to time in the provinces. Then came *Eden End* (1934), *Duet in Floodlight* (1935), *Cornelius,* and *Bees on the Boat Deck* (1936), *Time and the Conways* (1937), / *have been here before, People at Sea* and *Music at Night* (1938), *When we are Married* and *Johnson over Jordan* (1939), *The Long Mirror* and *Goodnight, Children* (1942).

At one time he had three new plays running concurrently in the West End, and just before the present war his plays were being produced simultaneously in no less than seven different capital cities! They have in fact invariably succeeded in America, Russia, France, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Austria and Finland. Unlike many dramatists, he takes a direct personal interest in the production of his plays, and once took over at very short notice a principal part in one of them.

His latest plays are *They Came to a City* and *Desert Highway.* Mr. Priestley has also written several films, and occasionally has appeared in them personally—as himself. He has just finished one in which he is appearing with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

It is partly due to Mr. J. B. Priestley's interest in music that the famous London Philharmonic Orchestra is still with us. In the middle of 1940, the Orchestra was in serious danger of being disbanded, for the first nine months of the war had brought it comparatively few engagements, and its directors were afraid that it would have to be dissolved, at least for the duration of the war. I will now •continue the story in the words of Mr. T. A. Russell, the Orchestra's Secretary and Business Manager:

"I first met Mr. Priestley in July 1940, when the affairs of the **LPO** were in very low water. I had tea with him at his house in Highgate, and we planned what was subsequently called a *Musical Manifesto,* to take place at Queen's Hall. Mr. Priestley promised to cover losses, if any; fortunately there were none. At this concert, he

made an appeal for funds which was very successful, and which saved us at our most difficult period. Since then, he has always shown a keen interest in our affairs, has spoken at special concerts for us, introduced us into one of his wireless programmes, and has written an excellent introduction to my book *Philharmonic,* published a year ago."

The film to which I have already referred was made by the Strand Film Co., Ltd., under the direction of Mr. Donald Taylor. It tells the story of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's life since the outbreak of the present war, and includes scenes with Mr. Priestley at the *Musical Manifesto.*

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Mr. Priestley is a man of medium stature, and—I don't think he will mind if I tell you—he is inclined to be stout. He has a most pleasant personality, and an infallible ability to see the funny side of things; in fact it is even rumoured that he has been known to make a joke over his Income Tax demands. When he is writing, he likes to be left quite alone for long periods, because his best work is done when he is in a sombre mood. "Company makes me cheerful and aggressive, acting upon mc as drink upon other men." Many successful novelists and playwrights are temperamental and "highly strung", but J. B. Priestley is just the opposite; he is placid, he never worries over trifles, and is not in the least "touchy".

When he was younger, he used to play several of the more strenuous games, but now his chief form of out-door recreation is an occasional game of tennis, though when he is able to get away from his work for a few days, he likes to go for long walks in the country, particularly in moorland and mountain districts.

Apart from his work, his chief interests in life are music, painting, psychology, and the study of such odd subjects as the "Time" problem. He confesses that he is a slave of tobacco, and he wouldn't be without his pipe for anything, particularly when he is working. "I don't know of anything in this lower world of taste and smell that gives me so much pleasure as tobacco," he tells us in one of his books, adding that if Hitler and Mussolini had been smokers, a couple of hundredweights of good tobacco might have saved the world a lot of misery.

He is a very tolerant person, but dislikes the irresponsible and inexperienced youths who pose as literary critics before they have achieved anything in the world of letters themselves. "They are too

timid and respectful in personal interview, and much too ferocious and arrogant with me in print."

One of his greatest desires is to see culture taking its proper place in our national life, for he believes that it can play an important part in the promotion of goodwill and understanding between the nations after the war. "Culture has a great effect upon international understanding," he told me when I questioned him upon this subject. "After generations of complete indifference towards the arts, chiefly due to the fact that the British politicians rarely know anything about them, the Government is at last doing a little . . . but official Britain still treats its writers and artists as if they were negligible. We are possibly worse than any other country in this respect. Goodwill between the nations will arrive when those nations are represented by men of goodwill—that is, disinterested persons who are not serving the interests of small but powerful groups. We havo all to start cleaning things up at home before we can reach world agreements. A solid understanding with Russia is particularly important."

For the best part of his life, Priestley has been a severe but good-natured critic of the social order of this country. He hates the humbug of "society", and has little use for titles. "From the moment it was known that honours could be bought, they should have been laughed out of existence," he declares in *Rain upon Oodsh'dl.* "What is the sense of handing over a counter, as if it were a pound of tea, membership of some noble-sounding order of chivalry? Why should rich men be encouraged to disguise themselves as feudal barons? This is called keeping up a tradition. It is no more keeping up a tradition than the auctioning of old armour can be called knight-errantry. It is prostituting a tradition. . . . We are humbugged day in and day out by this mediaeval masquerade. It prevents us ridding ourselves of the House of Lords."

In politics, J. B. P. is a socialist, but does not belong to any party. I have always felt that he dislikes labels as much as he deplores the empty catch-phrases one hears at election times. This is not surprising, considering that at tjie present time we have innumerable socialists playing at Toryism, and on the other hand an equal number of Conservatives who are trying to assure us that they have all the best principles of socialism at heart. Priestley inclines as far towards the Left as most intelligent, responsible men feel justified in doing at the present time, but it must not be imagined that his criticisms are directed only against reaction. He feels that a great deal of harm is being done by the extreme "leftists" in their fashionable contempt of

the middle-classes. That unfortunate word "bourgeois" has been bandied about to such an extent that its meaning has become absurdly distorted. Men like Mr. Priestley are getting a little tired of it. * ' I am extremely bourgeois and middle-class myself," he asserts, and considers that even if this class cannot be described as the backbone of the community, it contains a high proportion of the people to whom we shall have to look for guidance in the post-war period. He declares emphatically in *Rain upon Godshill* that he is on the side of the workers "... but I do not believe that there resides in them some mystical virtue that will somehow become the leaven of a new and greater culture; just as I do not believe that the art of literature has taken an immense step forward because a few not very good novels about communal cement works have been published."

He is inclined to distrust the Trade Union basis of the Labour Party, because he believes that a dictatorship of powerful Trade Unions would be just as bad as a dictatorship of wealth. He thinks that the Trade Union mentality is admirable in its own particular type of activity, but that it docs not possess all the qualities of ideal statesmanship.

It must not be imagined that his views are the product of some fashionable cult of his student days. He has little use for the type of person who gushes enthusiastically about the merits of the working classes at cocktail parties in sumptuous Mayfair flats, and who shrieks paeans in honour of the proletariat to the sound of sickly saxophones at three o'clock in the morning. He was born and grew up among the workers in the grim shadows of one of the worst industrial areas in the country, and he has never forgotten the terrible economic conditions that existed during his youth. He has watched the machines that produced vast wealth for the few, doom whole sections of the community to a life of misery. His sympathy for the workers is sincere: ". . . indeed their blood is mine, just as, I hope, their dreams are mine."

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1 am going to finish this sketch just where I began: with the Postscripts. Why was Priestley so successful as a broadcaster? I think this question can be answered very briefly: he talked commonsense in a sincere and unaffected voice, advocating a policy which amounts to nothing more than common decency and justice, without adopting the attitude of a supercilious schoolmaster talking down to a class of mentally deficient children. It is true that a certain very

small section of the community objected to these Postscripts, but I think I can safely say that for every person who objected to Mr. Priestley's broadcasts, at least ten thousand appreciated them.

Do you remember the Postscript on Sunday, July 28, 1940, when he told us about that high-spirited young couple in their battered little car; the husband, a tall casual lad who piloted one of our night bombers, and his pretty young wife who lodged near the aerodrome,, and who used to stay awake until the early hours of the morning to count the number of 'planes as they returned? Do you remember the moral of that talk? Mr. Priestley wanted to know if the young men who were risking everything for us now were to be sent trudging around with vacuum-cleaners when the war is over, or if the more "lucky" ones were to return to jobs in the soulless business world of cut-throat competition and "survival of the slickest". I am asking you to recall this because as we approach nearer to victory, the noble spirit of comradeship which blossomed out of our peril in 1940 is being pushed more and more into the background, and we begin to see the unmistakable signs of returning selfishness and intolerance, and of speculation to exploit other folk's misfortunes. I believe that if we are to build a better world, we must keep alive the nation's conscience—and J. B. Priestley, through the medium of the BBC, is the man to do it.

CECIL ROBEBTS

AT the present time Mr. Cecil Roberts is in America engaged on work of a semi-official nature, and for much of the story I am about to tell I have to*thank Mr. Lewis Richmond, the present Editor of the *Nottingham Journal,* who spent an evening with me recently in "The Coal Hole", that favourite rendezvous of journalists in the Strand.

Cecil Roberts was born in Nottingham in 1894, and educated locally. Through the influence of a friend he obtained work on leaving school in the Weights & Measures Office, but found it uninteresting, and made up his mind to get out as soon as possible by becoming a journalist. To escape from the monotony of petty clerical duties by this means is not an uncommon aspiration among young men who have literary inclinations, but unlike the vast majority, Mr. Roberts eventually succeeded, though five years elapsed before he effected his release, and the period of transition was full of anxiety and disappointment.

When he was little more than a boy he had an essay on *The Ascendancy of Wordsworth* accepted by the *Contemporary Review,* and when he called at the offices of the magazine the editor could scarcely believe that one so young could have written such a brilliant article. The editor also added that if he had been aware of the writer's youthfulness he could not have accepted the contribution!

Roberts also called at the offices of the *English Review,* and succeeded in seeing the editor, who was amazed at his ability to converse upon intellectual topics, but who advised him to concentrate upon political writing rather than upon poetry. While he was there, by the way, he met Norman Douglas, who was then the assistant editor.

But a few conversations in editorial offices do not make a journalist, so lie decided,to try to get into a bank. A local artist, William Kiddier, who had encouraged and befriended him, persuaded the manager of one of the Nottingham banks to give Roberts a trial. Everything was arranged satisfactorily, and Mr. Kiddier took Cecil Roberts out to tea at Clifton, a show village some four or five miles from the centre of the town, to celebrate his success. Two days later when the artist went into the bank the manager had to convey the disappointing

news that their Head Office had refused to accept the appointment of •Cecil Roberts because in his application he had stated that he had written a book of poems! They were afraid that poetry and banking did not make a good combination!

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At the age of twenty only a very modest amount of his work had appeared in print, apart from two small volumes of poetry *The Trent* (1912) and *Phyllislrata and other Poems* (1913), neither of which was very remunerative. However, he found that he was getting into a rut, and as his office work was imposing severe limitations upon his journalistic efforts, he made up his mind to leave his safe and steady employment and to earn his living somehow by writing. The decision proved to be a trifle rash (though he never regretted it), as he soon came to the end of his savings, and was obliged to accept a post as a junior master in a preparatory school. On the whole, the work was agreeable, but he persevered with his writing, still determined to succeed as an author. Most of his literary work had to be done in the evenings after he had marked the inevitable pile of exercise books, but he managed to complete a novel. As this was written to the accompaniment of incessant "practising" on the boys' piano in the next room, it is not surprising to learn that it was not a good novel* and although it eventually found a publisher, its immaturity contributed as little to his reputation as its very small sales did to his pocket. In fact, it took a great deal of "living down", and Mr. Roberts still gets a little hot under the collar when he discovers a copy in the house of a friend. The few copies that were sold seem to haunt him. I know nothing of this book personally, but I am quite sure it could not have been worse than some of the fatuous novels one sees so brazenly displayed in the windows of the twopenny libraries today*

Much to his credit, he had the sense to realize that he was unlikely to make a living out of novel-writing until he had gained a great deal more experience of life generally, so he resolved to get on the staff of a newspaper. He found that this was not such an easy task as he had imagined; he had no experience of the work, and most editors preferred to get their juniors straight from school; but he was so persistent that the editor of the *Nottingham Journal* at last agreed to take him as an unpaid pupil. By incredibly hard work and unfailing .audacity he progressed with astonishing rapidity from contributing odd paragraphs of news to the writing of a regular feature called *Men of the Hour,* This column became one of his greatest assets, for

the experience it gave won him an appointment on the staff of the *Liverpool Post* as literary editor and dramatic critic in 1915. Not a bad achievement for a young man of twenty-one. It is interesting to recall that before the management definitely offered him the position they invited him to send a biographical sketch and appreciation of Henry .Tames, who was then lying seriously ill and was not expected to recover. At that time Roberts had never even heard of Henry James, so he dashed off to the Public Library and enrolled the sympathy and interest of the City Librarian, who kindly lent him a formidable pile of books. In less than twelve hours he had made copious notes, written an authoritative article, and put it on the night train to Liverpool. It seemed incredible to the staff of the *Liverpool Post* that any man could have written such a brilliant analytical treatise and sent it by return of post.

While he was at Liverpool he got hold of an exclusive story of considerable importance concerning far-reaching proposals that would affect the future of that great port. He turned it into a sensational article for his own paper, and not knowing at that time the methods employed by the London papers, sent it also on telegraph forms at a cost of about £3 to a famous national daily. Not a line of his expensive "scoop" was used; the paper merely waited until the article could be quoted from the *Liverpool Post*—without payment, of course, to the embittered writer. He received congratulations on having his article quoted by so famous a national paper, but the loss of £8 was not easily forgotten.

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Before very long, the Great War brought him an opportunity of going as a Naval Correspondent with the Grand Fleet. In *Half-Way* he gives some splendid accounts of his adventures, and conveys his impressions of the high-spirited men with whom he served. I will quote one paragraph from this excellent book:

"I arrived on the bridge and hung about, for messages were coming in which concerned me greatly. It was my business to miss nothing, and to hear perhaps what I ought not to hear. There was something astir; a flimsy paper was brought up from the wireless room, the skipper looked at it and crammed it into his pocket. He whispered something to the sub, and they both glanced at me cautiously. Yes, they were keeping something from me! I tactfully began to question. The skipper's evasions increased my curiosity. I became bold, to the point of inviting a snub. At last the skipper yielded. He pulled the

'flimsy' out of his pocket and passed it to me. Elated, I peered at it:

HMS Blank to HMS Blue: Is damn journalist sick yet?"

Later, Mr. Roberts became an accredited correspondent with the RAF, and subsequently with the British Armies on the Western Front, for the Newspaper Society and Reuters. It is interesting to note the names of some of his colleagues at this time: Capt. C. E. Montague *(Manchester Guardian),* Percy Robinson *(The Times),* Pereival Phillips *(Daily Express),* Beach Thomas *(Daily Mail),* Philip Gibbs *(Daily Chronicle),* H. W. Nevinson *(Daily News),* and H. Russell (Reuter's).

Cecil Roberts also served for a while as an Assistant Director of Munitions, Overseas Transport, and as a Statistical Officer in the American Department of the British Ministry of Munitions.

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His literary activities during the War were not confined to official duties, for he published *Collected War Poems* in 1916, *Twenty-Six Poems* and *The Chelsea Cherub* in 1917, and *Charing Cross* in 1918.

He returned to this country in 1919 and became an Examining Officer to the Civil Liabilities Commission, but resigned after nine months because he found the work of making small grants to ex-Service men too harrowing, and he disliked the apparently unnecessary complications of the bureaucratic machinery. It was too much like the Circumlocution Office. He did not return to the *Liverpool Post,* but instead devoted his time to free-lance work, and acted as London Correspondent and literary critic of the *Liverpool Courier.* His days were full of hard work, but he was happy.

In 1920 he visited New York in the course of a lecture tour in the United States, but I shall have more to say about his impressions of America later. On his return in the same year, Sir Charles Starmer offered him the editorship of the *Nottingham Journal.* He was then only twenty-six years of age, and this offer of such an important post in provincial journalism was almost staggering; it was only a few years since he had pleaded to be taken on the staff of this paper as an unpaid "cub" reporter! Thus he became the youngest editor m England, at the helm of one of the oldest daily newspapers in the country. Founded in 1710, the *Nottingham Journal* was (and still is) a reputable paper with which Sir James Barrie had once been associated as a leader writer. It had declined in the early part of the

present century, and the appointment of Mr. Roberts was part of Sir Charles Starmer's plan for re-vitalizing it. He could not have chosen a better man. The opportunity of returning to his native town where his mother still lived fired Mr. Roberts with enthusiasm, and he set about his new work with all the zeal of his youth.

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Mr. Roberts believes that journalism provides the best possible training lor young writers, particularly those who wish to succeed as novelists, for it offers wonderful opportunities to see all the diversities of character in men and women, their hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, their vanities, kindnesses, cruelties, loves and stupidities. In *Half Way* he tells us: "Dignitaries of the churches creep up your stairs to stiletto colleagues, politicians offer betrayal of their friends without the price of twenty pieces of silver; philanthropists, before the gift is made, ensure that publicity is certain."

Cecil Roberts deplores the improper uses to which a newspaper can be put by an unscrupulous proprietor, and sharply criticizes the editors who, through fear of dismissal, tolerate corruption and permit their papers to defend reprehensible policies. "I have seen a newspaper proprietor with a grudge against a statesman, hound him daily in the columns of his paper, wilfully misinterpret him, jaundice his case, invent an outcry, manufacture a correspondence and call upon the brains of the whole staff to attack the reputation of the offending politician. And to this call, the editor and all his men of scholarship and brains have responded, joining the hue and cry, not daring to make a protest for fear of the consequences." Mr. Roberts admits that cases as bad as this are exceptional, but insists that they could never occur at all if editors and journalists made a stand against such abuse.

He also shows in *Half-Way* that even the locally-owned independent paper is not always free from corruption, as its very existence often depends upon one or two large advertisers in the vicinity, who with the threat of boycott can dictate the paper's policy, and use it to silence local criticism of their commercial, public or even private activities. *

On the other hand, Mr. Roberts strongly opposes the Socialists' demand for a State-owned press, which, he considers, would result in the highest form of tyranny. Every person who is interested in the free press of this country should read Mr. Roberts' autobiography, because it gives such a splendid view of the problems as they are

seen from the editor's chair. On the whole, the British press gives a very fair commentary on political affairs; compared with the deplorable conditions in other countries, our national papers are models of integrity, but there is room for a great deal of improvement. It is still far too easy for unscrupulous people to advertise worthless patent medicines in our papers. The medical profession can do nothing against the power of big advertisers.

Having said this, I must add that Mr. Cecil Roberts' connection with the *Nottingham Journal* was a particularly happy one, that paper having always been singularly free from undesirable influence. He was its editor for five years, during which he published a play called *A Tale of Young Lovers,* and three novels, *Scissors* (1922), *Sails of Sunset* (1924) and *The Love Rack* (1925).

The play was first performed in Nottingham by a repertory company, which later became financially embarrassed. On hearing of its plight, Mr. Roberts approached Sir Jesse Boot (the beneficent founder of the famous Cash Chemists, who afterwards became Lord Trent) and persuaded him to give £2,000 to put the repertory company on its feet again.

Sails of Sunset was inspired by the sight of the fruit boats with their gaily-coloured sails in Venice.

While he was at Nottingham, Mr. Roberts was adopted as the Independent Liberal candidate for East Nottingham, but his health broke down under the strain of conducting his election campaign as well as carrying out his editorial duties.

He left the *Nottingham Journal* in 1925, and was immediately offered the editorship of *The Financial Times,* and an editorial appointment on the staff of the *Westminster Gazette.* He declined both, because he was determined to make a career as a novelist. The following list of his books is a tribute to his success:

Little Mrs. Manington (192(5), *The Right, to Kiss* (a play, lirst produced in 1926), *Sagusto* (1927), *David and Diana* (1928), *Indiana Jane* and *Pamelas Spring Song* (1929), *Havana Bound* (1930), *Half Way* (1931), *Bargain Basement* (1931), *Spears Against Us* (1932), *Life of Sir Alfred Fripp* (1932), *Pilgrim Cottage* (1933), *Gone Rustic* (1934), *The Guests Arrive* (1934), *Volcano* (1935), *Gone Afield* (1936), *Gone Sunwards* (1936). *Victoria Four-Thirty* (1937), *They Wanted to Live* (1938), *And So To Bath* (1938), *The Small Candle* (1942), and *So Immortal a Flower* (1944).

He made four lecture tours in the United States and Canada in 1920, 1924, 1926 and 1929, and found the audiences to be "the best in the world".

During his second visit he gave the Commemoration Address at Washington and Jefferson University, and received an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. He was amazed at the lavish equipment of many of the American Universities, and marvelled at the elaborate provisions made for the education of the American citizens of tomorrow. Mr. Richmond tells me that Roberts brought home his diploma in a cardboard tube, and put it away in a spare room. Several years later during a "Spring clean" he found the tube, but discovered that the mice had got inside it and eaten the parchment! It is surely a sign of distinction when even one's household mice have academical taste.

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Mr. Richmond believes that as a conversationalist there has been none to equal Cecil Roberts since Oscar Wilde. He tells me that while Roberts was editor of the *Nottingham Journal* he produced brilliant articles as easily and as rapidly as a tap produces water—but his articles were anything but watery; they were like champagne, sparkling and invigorating. As a lecturer he was Equally successful; his descriptions of places were spectacular and colourful; his wit never failed, and he was a master of epigram.

Cecil Roberts is an outspoken man, and that is perhaps why he has not gone very far in politics up to the present time. I am told that when he was standing as a candidate for East Nottingham he spoke at a meeting where temperance organizations were well represented, and said, "Although I appreciate the principles of temperance I deplore the kill-joy attitude of so many of the advocates of total abstinence." Not a very tactful remark to make when the support of the abstainers might have turned the scales in his favour—and remember, Mr. Roberts rarely drank intoxicants himself—but it is typical of him; he never minced matters or pandered to silly prejudices or idiosyncracies merely to gain popularity.

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Mr. Roberts writes to me from the University Club, New York, saying:

"I have no views about post-war Reconstruction. I am no believer in that bright world to be made for us by the very politicians who have brought us to ruin in this one. I am afraid they will do what they did last time, play politics and get their way with bread

:and circuses for the tired public. The human race never alters. We should be wise to cultivate our gardens, as the old philosopher said. Having made of the world a hell, I cannot think why we should expect to be suddenly transported to a Garden of Eden. The speeches of the younger Pitt in Napoleon's day need no trimming for the use of our new-era politicians of todav."

G. BERNARD SHAW

IN thirteen years from now Mr. Bernard Shaw will be just one hundred years of age, and I think it not at all unlikely that some young imp will walk up to him and say, "Hi! what did *you* do in the great World War?" Shaw, fiddling with the saddle of his bicycle, will reply, " I preserved the sanity of the greatest nation upon earth." The boy will then pull a ghastly face in the approved Hollywood fashion and exclaim, "Huh! ses you. Betcha bob y'can't race me down to the pub." And Shaw, hopping on to his bicycle and beating the boy by a length and a half, will present him with a shilling, and retire for a glass of milk—neat.

I now tender my sincerest apologies to the world's greatest living dramatist, and affirm my belief that in teaching us to laugh at ourselves, he has done more than any other writer in modern history to make us an intelligent nation. He has ridiculed the humbug of our conventions to such an extent that we are now beginning to see signs of common sense—or as G.B.S. calls it, UNcommon sense—in the speeches of a few of our politicians; and although I do not wish to be unduly optimistic, I will even go so far as to say that if the leaven of Shaw's influence continues to be effective, there is a possibility that sometime within the next fifty years the members of our Civil Service will begin to show a little consideration for the common people whose taxes pay their salaries.

George Bernard Shaw is a native of Dublin. His father was a wholesale corn merchant, his mother was the daughter of a gentleman of property, and he had two sisters both older than himself. He hated the sort of people who patted him on the head, and above all, bitterly resented being sent to church with his two sisters to sit through interminable sermons in which he could take no interest. The principal theme of religious teaching in those days was that God was a Protestant Gentleman and that all Roman Catholics and other rascals went to hell when they died. After a year or two of this the young Shaw put his foot down and steadfastly refused to go to church under any circumstances.

He was educated first by a governess and a clerical uncle, and then at the Wesleyan Connexional School at Dublin, where he shirked his "prep", took no interest whatever in competitive examinations, **and,**

we are told, learned very little. He has always deprecated the use of Shakespeare as an instrument of torture in schools, and for that reason he has invariably refused to allow any of his own works to appear in school-books. He believes that his own plays, like those of Shakespeare, must never be forced upon those who are unwilling to understand them. He attended one or two other schools for a short while, where he says he received no small amount of instruction in "lying, dishonourable submission to tyranny, dirty stories, a blasphemous habit of treating love and maternity as obscene jokes, hopelessness, evasion, derision, cowardice, and all the blackguard's shifts by which the coward intimidates other cowards".

His dislike of all forms of sport originated in his childhood, and he was bored by all the books written for children, with the exception of *Robinson Crusoe.* Shakespeare, on the other hand, aroused his interest at a very early age, and he had read many of the plays before he was ten. He inherited his mother's great love of music, and taught himself to play the piano. The Opera, which he frequently visited, never ceased to fascinate him; and by spending much of his time in the National Gallery of Ireland he learned an appreciation of art.

When his father's business began to decline, his mother came to London to teach music, and at the age of fifteen Shaw had to seek employment. He became a clerk in the office of a "superior" firm of land agents at 18s. a month, but was so efficient that in a very short time he rose to the position of cashier at £48 a year. One of his duties was the collection of weekly rents in a very poor part of Dublin; an experience which aroused his interest in social problems. At this time he became BM atheist, and had long arguments with the other young men in the office. At the age of twenty he was getting £84 a year, but he had become determined to escape from business and to make a literary career for himself, so he gave in his notice, packed his carpet bag and came to London. His mother was then living in a house just off the Brompton Road, so he went to stay with her and persuaded her to teach him to sing and to improve his technique on the piano.

He realized of course that he could hardly become the King of English Literature immediately, so he accepted a job with the Edison Telephone Company in Queen Victoria Street. He often had to go round interviewing people to persuade them to allow the company to put wires across their property, and he was frequently mistaken for a hawker, and treated accordingly. So it is not at all surprising that he soon grew tired of the job, and left at the earliest opportunity.

He started writing articles, and sold the first to *One and All* for 15s., but the editors displayed no great enthusiasm for his work; in fact, during the nine years 1876-85 his total earnings from literary work were only £6. His first novel *Immaturity* was written in 1879 and promptly rejected by every publisher in London. Shaw was not in the least dismayed; he continued writing and produced four more novels, *The Irrational Knot, Love Among the Artists, Cashel Byron's Profession* (which first appeared as a serial in the magazine *To-day)* and *The Unsocial Socialist,* At first they all failed miserably, but he never became disheartened. Indeed, the lack of encouragement seemed only to harden him, and he persisted doggedly, writing at least five pages a day. Later, when he was making his name as a critic, all these novels were eagerly sought by the publishers. He now disapproves of his early efforts, which he describes as "intolerable*'. Most people find them to be quite entertaining, chiefly because of their excellent dialogue, but they cannot of course be compared with his plays.

He very soon became well-known in London as an ardent socialist, because in order to learn the art of public speaking he attended the meetings of every debating society he could find. He was extremely nervous for the first few weeks, but discovered very quickly that he was a match for anybody, and with ever-increasing confidence became one of socialism's most fiery propagandists. Hecklers and other undesirable interrupters found that he always had devastating replies waiting for them, and consequently his services as a speaker were in constant demand. What an impression he must have made at those meetings, many of which were held at street corners or in the public parks, with the six-foot Shaw standing on a soap-box! Before long he had progressed from socialism to Marxism, improving upon its economics with his own ideas, and he found in Sidney Webb a perfect collaborator in his political activities. He also became acquainted with William Morris, who, it is believed, invented the adjective "Shavian".

In 1881 he became a vegetarian, and he has never reverted to a carnivorous diet because he says his vegetables have always kept him "ten times as well as an ordinary carcass eater". At the same time he became a humanitarian, and violently opposed blood-sports, capital punishment and the floggings which were in vogue in those days. He was very poor, and frequently spent no more than sixpence a day on food. His boots were cracked and broken, and the holes in the seat of his trousers were hidden only by the tails of a coat that was turning

green with age. He used to say that his main reason for adopting literature as a profession was the absence of any obligation to dress respectably ! When he began to prosper, he became very eccentric for a while in the choice of clothes. He was seen once or twice in an astounding knitted garment combining jacket and trousers in one piece! Mr. Frank Harris said that it made him look like a forked radish in a worsted bifurcated stocking. Happily, he grew tired of this creation because when he walked it made a curious noise like that of a grasshopper, and provoked caustic comments from his associates. While I am on the subject of Shaw's sartorial taste, I will add that the legend about his refusal to wear evening dress is quite untrue, in fact he has said on more than one occasion that he likes to be seen in it because it makes him look like a duke!

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The initial failure of his novels to find a publisher made him look to journalism as a more remunerative occupation, and he became an art critic for *The World* at five pence a line. lie also contributed to one or two other papers, but his relations with the editors were apt to become stormy, and he lost several commissions because he was unwilling to compromise with other people's views. I must emphasize, however, that he never tried to get work by undercutting his rivals. On the contrary, he exacted adequate payment for his work. On one occasion when the fee offered was rather parsimonious, the editor's assistant received the following letter:

"DEAR SIR,

Please inform the editor that I will sec him and you and the whole *Chronicle* staff boiled in hell before I will do it for that money."

Most of his writing was done at the British Museum, where, incidentally, he met Samuel Butler. His total earnings for the year 1885 amounted to £112. Three years later he became the music critic to *The Star* at two guineas a week. He adopted the pseudonym *Corni di Bassetto;* a wise precaution, as his articles sent most of the academic musicians into paroxysms of rage. His criticisms were entirely free of technicalities and therefore easily understood by the uninstructed music-lover. He spared nobody; composers, performers and audiences were all treated with the same ruthlessness. The directors of the London Philharmonic Society, for instance, were informed that they should be compelled to retire at the age of ninety-five. All the fashionable humbug that had- become a ritual at the

London concerts and operas was pilloried mercilessly. After an exceptionally dreary piano recital he wrote: "There is nothing that soothes me more after a long and maddening course of pianoforte recitals than to sit and have my teeth drilled by a finely skilled hand." To cap it all, he stoutly defended Richard Wagner, who was then considered by the musical *ilite* to be demented.

After two years with *The Star* he went back to *Tlie World* as a music critic, dropping the pseudonym, and instead, using his initials. In passing, let me say that in 1895, when Oscar Wilde was convicted, Shaw made a great effort to obtain signatures to a petition for his release, but failed, and had to be content with making appreciative references to Wilde's work whenever he had an opportunity. I refer to this because his defence of that "'unmentionable" playwright illustrates his utter indifference to public opinion.

In the same year, Shaw agreed to become the dramatic critic of *The Saturday Review,* which had been bought by Frank Harris. This £G-a-week job brought him into contact with such people as Sir Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, and he became the champion of Ibsen, for whose work he had the highest admiration. He criticized playwrights, actors and actresses, with the same candour that he had shown to the musical profession. One modern play of the more fashionable type he described as "A tailor's advertisement making sentimental remarks to a milliner's advertisement in the middle of an upholsterer's and decorator's advertisement". It is not surprising that an American actress visiting this country threatened to shoot him if he wrote a single word about her. In April 1898 he was obliged to undergo two operations on one of his feet, and as he had become tired of his job as a critic, he resigned, and was succeeded by Max Beerbohm. "1 can never justify to myself the spending of four years on dramatic criticism . . . the subject is exhausted; and so am I . "

Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses,* was first produced by J. T. Grein at the Royalty Theatre in 1892 and had a mixed reception of applause and hisses from the audience, and downright abuse from the critics. It tells of an idealistic young man who becomes engaged to the daughter of a millionaire, but who refuses to marry her when he discovers that her father's income is derived from slum property. He then learns that his own income is produced by mortgages on precisely the same property!

In the following year Shaw wrote *The Philanderer,* in which we find rebellion—and later acquiescence—to the marriage conventions; and *Mrs. Warren's Profession,* the most outspoken and controversial

play of its time, which was promptly suppressed by the Lord Chamberlain, who stupidly failed to see the moral of it. The ban was not lifted until 1924, and when Shaw was consulted about its production he exclaimed "Better never than late". It is a frank, just and reasonable indictment of the conditions that cause prostitution, and, as one would expect, the Censor's action caused a tremendous sensation. Shaw wrote: "We are allowed and encouraged to make the stage an attractive advertisement for prostitution and to drive the young to the brothel by the most potent of aphrodisiacs; but when I dramatized the truth about prostitution in *Mrs. Warren's Profession,* the play was at once prohibited."

One can scarcely believe that the Lord Chamberlain had any sympathy with the capitalist in the play, who had money invested in brothels, and who demanded:

"Why the devil shouldn't I invest my money that way? I take the interest on my capital like other people. I hope you don't think 1 dirty my own hands with the work. You wouldn't cut the Archbishop of Canterbury, I suppose, because the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have a few publicans and sinners among their tenants. And do you expect me to turn my back on thirty-five per cent when all the rest are pocketing what they can, like sensible *men* ? No such fool! If you're going to pick and choose your acquaintances on moral principles, you'd better clear out of this country, unless you want to cut yoursell out of all decent society."

This play was performed privately by the Stage Society in 1002 at the New Lyric Club, and it was produced in New York three years later, where colossal prices were paid for seats—until the public realized that there was nothing obscene in it!

In 1894, after writing *Anns and the Man* (a most entertaining farcical comedy which was not a financial success when it was first produced) he wrote his famous play, *Candida,* which was first performed in the provinces by a touring company. It was put on in London by the Stage Society at the Strand Theatre in 1900, with Janet Achurch in the title role and Granville Barker playing the part of Marchbanks. This play, about the intelligent, attractive wife of a socialist clergyman, who is tempted to run away with a yuung poet, was his first big success, and later made a great stir in America.

The Man of Destiny, written in 1895, was not produced until two years later, when an indifferent performance was given at the Grand Theatre, Croydon. *You Never Can Tell* followed with a first performance at the Royalty Theatre by the Stage Society in 1899, and

in a very few years it became most popular—I might almost say an obsession—with repertory companies and dramatic societies, although Shnw himself thinks it is a poor play.

Next came *The Devil's Disciple,* first staged, not in this country but in America. Mr. Richard Mansfield put it on in New York in 1897, where it had a long run, and brought its author something like i'3.000.

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Now I leave his plays for a moment to come to a more personal mutter. At about that time he met Miss Charlotte Payne-Townshcnd, at a garden party held by a member of the Fabian Society, of which Shaw had become a member. She was a wealthy woman, partly Irish, and a most enthusiastic socialist. When G.B.S. found that he needed secretarial assistance, who could have made a better secretary? And when his health broke down, who could have been a more sympathetic and devoted nurse? You've guessed the consequences. In but a few months they had become "indispensable to one another", to use Shaw's own words, and they were married at the West Strand Registry Office on June 1, 1898, with Graham Wallas and Henry Salt as witnesses. Shaw was wearing one of his oldest jackets. I will quote his own words again:

"The registrar never imagined I could possibly be the bridegroom. He took me for the inevitable beggar who completes all wedding processions. Wallas, over six feet tall, was so obviously the hero of the occasion that the registrar was on the point of marrying him to my betrothed. But Wallas, thinking the formula rather too strong for a mere witness, hesitated at the last moment, and left the prize to me."

They went to Haslemere, where a suitable house had been taken, and within a few weeks Shaw fell down the stairs and broke his left arm. Nevertheless, he wrote a book on Wagner, *The Perfect Wagnerite,* during the next few months, and was then sent to the Isle of Wight by his doctor to complete his convalescence. He settled down to finish *Ccesar and Cleopatra,* upon which he had been engaged for some time, and in 1899 took his wife on a Mediterranean cruise, but he soon got tired of the restricted life on board. When they returned to London they took a house in Adclphi Terrace, and acquired a country house at Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire, some five or six years later. The latter is still their home.

The autumn of 1903 found Shaw standing as the Progressive candidate for St. Pancras in the London County Council election, but

his candour was too much for the voters, and he was defeated by a large majority.

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The first decade of the present century saw the production of such plays as *Man and Superman, John BulVs Other Island, Major Barbara,* and *Getting Married.* The first of these is a lengthy work in which Shaw reveals his views on Creative Evolution. *John BulVs Other Island,* first produced at the Court Theatre, was an amazing success, and a Command Performance was given before King Edward V I I on March 11, 1905. It is said that the King laughed so much that he broke the chair on which he sat! A notorious anecdote obtains about this play. When Mr. John Shine was acting in it he remarked to Shaw that the exit of one of the characters in one particular scene appeared exactly as if he were leaving the stage to relieve himself. G. B. S. replied that to give that impression was precisely his intention!

Major Barbara, an entirely different play about the Salvation Army, was also produced at the Court Theatre in the same year, and *Getting Married* first appeared at the Haymarket Theatre in 1908.

Pygmalion, in which the expletive "bloody" is the delight of every schoolboy, was first staged at His Majesty's Theatre on April 11, 1914, with Mrs. Patrick Campbell as the flower-girl. As everybody knows, it was made into an extremely popular film some twenty years later, and it started the rumour that Shaw had become a millionaire on the proceeds of his plays. His royalties on *Pygmalion* were, of course, quite handsome, but after income tax had been deducted, they totalled rather less than £30,000.

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The Great War did not come as a surprise to Bernard Shaw. He had already warned the country in 1913 and had made proposals which might possibly have prevented it, but of course nobody took him seriously. So when the shooting started he wrote *Common Sense and the War,* which brought him more abuse than anything he had ever written before—chiefly from people who hadn't bothered to read it. The Press suggested a boycott of his plays, and he was expelled from the Dramatists' Club; an action which made Granville Barker resign in protest. Curiously enough, Sir Douglas Haig invited Shaw to visit the front lines early in 1917. He went in high spirits with C. E. Montague, touring Ypres, the Somme, Arras and the Vimy Ridge.

After the war, he made suggestions concerning the Peace Con-

terence, but they were ignored, and he did little in the political world until 1928 when he visited Geneva and attended the assembly of the League of Nations. The proceedings made a very poor impression upon him. In the same year he wrote'*The Intelligent Woman's Guide Jo Socialism,* in which his suggestions for equal incomes provoked a #reat deal of ridicule and criticism. One of his friends, in discussing this book with him, remarked that Christ had advised the rich man to sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor. Shaw's retort was: "As Jesus never had any property and left all the business of his ministry to Judas, he simply did not know what he was talking about He should have advised the opulent young man that under Roman rule he could do no better than invest his money in gilt-edged or in land and drop what he could spare into Judas's bag."

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Heartbreak House was written during the Great War, but was not performed until 1921, when it opened at the Court Theatre. Its first run was not very successful, but soon afterwards it drew packed houses in Birmingham, and in a year or two was considered to be one of Shaw's best plays. The same sort of reception was given to *Back to Methuselan* (1923); the critics and the public took several years to appreciate it. Mr. Arnold Bennett, who admitted having slept through part of the first cycle of this play, said "It was terrible".

However, it was followed by Shaw's crowning success, *St. Joan,* which was first produced at the New Theatre on March 26, 1924, and soon after staged in New York by the Theatre Guild. The toleration he displayed in this towards the Roman Catholic Church brought an enquiry as to whether he was thinking of becoming a Catholic himself. Shaw replied, "There's no room for two Popes in the Roman Catholic Church." This play brought the whole world to his feet, though personally I do not consider it to be his best, nor do many of the critics whose judgment I respect.

The Apple Cart, about a clever, dictatorial king, made its first appearance in Warsaw, at the Polsky Theatre in June 1929. It was followed by *Too True to be Good* in 1932.

Shaw's latest works include: *Village Wooing* and *On the Rocks* (1988), *Six of Calais* and *The Simpleton of Unexpected Isles* (1934), *The Millionairess* (1936) *Geneva* (1938; *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1939), and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944).

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Shaw visited Russia with Lord and Lady Astor and the Marquis of fvothian in 1931. He met Joseph Stalin, and was delighted to find

that this great man had a sense of humour. Although he criticized here and there, Shaw was favourably impressed with the New Russia. He was very pleased to find that the practice of "tipping" so objectionable in this country and in America, was entirely absent. He tried on several occasions to give gratuities to people in Moscow, but with little success. Those who would like to know more about his views on the U.S.S.R. should read Mr. Hesketh Pearson's admirable biography of Bernard Shaw, which gives a full account of his visit.

At the age of seventy-five Shaw started "globe-trotting'*, visiting India, Africa, America, and China to mention only a few of the countries he saw. He flew over the Great Wall of China in an aeroplane. In a press interview after his tour he said, among other things, "Siam is worth a visit because there the young generation respects the wisdom of the very old. They even seek the advice of their more experienced elders. Now here in England, I have to give my advice unsought, and no one pays the smallest attention to it." He added, however, that having asked their elders' advice, the young Siamese never acted upon it, and that they would be very stupid if they did —as there is no Siamese Shaw!

Music-lovers will be particularly interested to know that Shaw was a great friend of Sir Edward Elgar. They frequently met at the Malvern Festival and enjoyed long conversations on musical topics, and when Elgar wrote his *Severn Suite* he dedicated it to G. B. S., whom he described as "the best friend to any artist, the kindest and possibly the dearest fellow on earth".

When King Edward VIII abdicated, Shaw expressed his opinions in a "fictitious dialogue" in the *Evening Standard,* between the King of the Half-Mad (who wanted to marry a Mrs. Daisy Bell) and his Prime Minister and Archbishop, You can guess for yourself what Shaw really thought about the whole affair.

As many people know, he once received a letter from a lady in Zurich suggesting that he could give her the most perfect child in the world because she had the most beautiful body and he had the greatest brain. His only reply was the question: "What if the child inherits my body and your brain?"

For several years prior to the present war, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw lived at 4 Whitehall Court, and he was frequently seen taking exercise in St. James's Park. Now, he spends most of his time at Ayot St. Lawrence. His favourite forms of exercise have always been cycling and swimming, and he still enjoys motoring. He has no use for sport, particularly the types beloved by the average Englishman.

Shaw is one of the most fascinating celebrities of • our time. He is over six feet in lieight, he has fine white hair and sharp, grey-blue eyes. His Irish brogue is to many people a perpetual source of delight, and he still has a hearty laugh. Despite the wartime shortage of certain forms of vegetarian food, he never touches meat, and enjoys light meals served punctually at regular intervals. He does not smoke, and never takes intoxicants.

It would be difficult to find a man of Shaw's greatness who is so kind and considerate to everybody. The following instance is typical. Many years ago he attended a luncheon party given by H. G. Wells at which an impressive number of distinguished guests were present. Frank Swinnerton, then a young man almost unknown in the literary world, arrived late looking obviously embarrassed as nobody seemed to be taking any notice of him. Shaw immediately crossed the room, greeted him heartily as if he were an old and highly esteemed friend, and took him into lunch.

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I must confess that when I approached Bernard Shaw for his view& on some of the problems of today and to-morrow, I expected a refusal in the form of a typically flippant, Shavian answer, for at the age of eighty-seven he must be getting a little tired of the innumerable people who try to interview him. There are so many people in this country who deliberately misunderstand him, and who are too stupid to know when he is pulling their legs. To achieve eminence in. oratory nowadays one has to state a simple and obvious fact over and over again as if it were a slogan of some national advertiser. Oh! how superior we were when the dictators adopted this method of fooling their people several years ago! However, Shaw is still hopeful for us. As you will see from the answers he gave me, he is still being very patient with us, and do you not detect a new note of toleration?

1 asked him first how far he thinks the Russians will allow us to decide the fate of Germany when the war is over, because so many people imagine blissfully that Joseph Stalin will permit us to make nice gentlemanly terms with Hitler's successor, casually inviting the Russians, who have done by far the greater part of the dirty work, to witness the happy ceremony. Shaw replied, "Russia will insist on her 1939 western frontier. On other points the Powers will carry wliat weight they can. Hong Kong will be a troublesome nut to crack; but Russia will not bother about it."

I pursued the point a little further and asked him if he thought the present Government would be sufficiently foolish to quarrel with

Russia when the dictators have been eliminated, because the possibility of such a disaster is worrying a great number of the more far-sighted people today. I have already met men who talk about being prepared for war with Russia, with little thought of the mischief they are making. Shaw's reply was reassuring:

"Governments of Anybodies selected by Everybody are ignorant enough for anything; but an attempt to make waf on Soviet Russia would rouse such a storm of conscientious objection when it came to conscription that the cry of "Hands off Russia' would defeat it."[1]

MYSELF: "Should Hitler and Mussolini be allowed to live—if we get them alive?"

G. B. S.: "They would both say, 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first, stone.' Which of us dare appear in court against them?"

MYSELF: "Are you in tavour of a United States of Europe?"

G. B. S.: "1 am in favour of the utmost practicable federation of States, in Europe and everywhere else."

MYSELF: "Should private armament manufacturers be allowed to continue in the business?"

G. B.. S.: "State armaments should of course be a State monopoly; but private manufacture of weapons for sport and self-defence need not be outlawed."

Shaw's toleration of the manufacture of weapons for *sport* is rather interesting, because he has always strongly opposed blood-sports.

I then informed him that in making recent enquiries I had found several famous authors who thought that we should be ruled by a bureaucratic dictatorship after the war. His observation was: "I had rather be ruled by a bureaucracy than by an irresponsible private employer. But bureaucracies are ruled by dictators. Calling them Cabinet Ministers does not change their nature."

Coming to plans for reconstruction I asked if he were in favour of the Beveridge scheme. He replied: "Yes. It is a very able and knowledgable estimate of the ransom that the Labour Party might now impose on Capitalism for its continued toleration."

MYSELF: "DO you favour a General Election before the end of the war?"

G. B. S.: "No!"

MYSELF: "Immediately after the war then?'*

G. B. S.: "Certainly not! A 'Hang Hitler election would be calamity."

• This reply was given before the Teheran conference.

This brought me to the future of religion in this country, particularly as fur as the Church of England is concerned.

MYSELF: **"Do you favour the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England ?"**

G. B. S.: "No. We need much more establishment and endowment, not less. But 1 am against the exclusion of the Free Churches from the use of the cathedrals and parish churches for their rituals."

MYSELF: **"Should religion be taught in schools?'"**

G. B. S.: "Yes, of course. The only question is *vctiat shall be taught in the name of religion"*

MYSELF: **"Should the Church continue its control of the church schools?"**

G. B. S.: "The Church should control its own schools, but not the State Schools; and the State should inspect all schools and license them, closing them if they are inefficient or insanitary."

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I am concluding with a brief quotation from Frank Swinnerton's famous book, *The Georgian Literary Scene,* a copy of which every reading man and woman should possess:

"Shaw is *not* a reformed character. He never will be. He is Shaw. And he has always recognized the value of work by other authors, even though it was work antipathetic to him. He has sat devotedly in the uncomfortable seats of innumerable theatres and perceived and remembered the talents of actors and actresses struggling with bad small parts. . . . He has been modest, polite, and considerate to strangers whom he could have eaten (had he been omnivorous) out of hand. These traits are worth pondering in connection with his genius. They can be set beside his notorious self-advertising, which in comparison with the laborious and pointless self-advertisement of a hundred modern quack-authors» is positively reticent, and which was always undertaken as publicity for his ideas as well as publicity for himself. And while it is true that he lias made his characters say and do many things upon the stage with the sole object of raising a laugh —as in my judgment he was entitled to do—he has never written any work with the sole object of exhibiting the wonders of G. B. S. As nearly as possible, he is selfless, a disinterested author who has worked for the destruction of error; and for him the whole business of any writer worth his salt (apart from those 'artists' for whom he professes such contempt and has in fact such respect) is that of arousing from sleep or lethargy the God or the Will in mankind."

FRANK SWINNERTON

FOR many years Mr. Frank Swinnerton has been recognized a* an able and scrupulously fair literary critic, but in my opinion, the British public has been slow to appreciate his skill as a novelist. His Books have always been successful in this country—some more than others—but their sales have been infinitely greater in America, although he has never attempted to write specifically for any but his own countrymen. This is a mystery to me. He is typically English; he invariably writes about quite ordinary people, putting them in scenes that are commonplace in this country, and he always has a good story to tell; yet the Americans rhapsodize over his books while we read them with calm approval. Perhaps it is just a case of a prophet being in his own country. But I am sure of one thing: hi& novels will be read with appreciation long after many of his contemporaries have been forgotten.

He was born at Wood Green, Middlesex, in 1884. His father, a copperplate engraver, had come from a Staffordshire family of craftsmen; his mother was of Scottish descent. They were very poor indeed, for his father's craft had been declining steadily for many years, and the small amount of work available was casual and ill-paid. Much was due in those early days to the skill, devotion, intelligence and hard work of his mother, whose ability to "make ends meet" saved the family from humiliation.

At the age of six, we find Frank Swinnerton in the choir of St. Mary's Aldermanbury, and attending an infants' school in the King's Cross district. He was keenly interested in his lessons and made good progress, but at the age of eight he became paralysed on one side, and was completely disabled for two years. Fortunately, he recovered and was able to resume his education, but the teaching he received was of a poor standard, and he must have been a backward pupil for some time.

At the age of fourteen, he left school and obtained work in the offices of *The Scottish Cyclist* at six shillings a week. To him, the greatest advantage of the job was that he worked in the vicinity of Fleet Street, and was allowed to run errands in that wonderland of print. It stirred in him the urge to write, and his first literary effort was a letter to a weekly review, which duly appeared in the corres-

pondence columns. Then he started a tiny duplicated magazine of his own called *Joltings** written chiefly for the benefit of the small office staff of which he was the junior. He was a sharp, intelligent lad, and soon discovered that his job was leading him nowhere, so he moved, first to *The Estates Gazette* and then to the offices of the publicity agent tor a steamship company, but neither of these situations pleased him, 'and eventually he secured a post with Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons, the famous publishers, as "reception clerk, salesman and utility boy" at thirteen shillings a week. This was obtained through the kindness of a boy named Garfield Howe, who also had been pro--ducing a home-made magazine with the assistance of his younger brother. Swinnerton had become very friendly with him, as their amateur journalism was a common interest, and when Howe went to work at Dent's, he mentioned his friend's desire to work in a publisher's office.

Frank Swinnerton made rapid progress, and was soon promoted to the position of personal and confidential clerk to Mr. J. M. Dent, a precise and exacting man of whom the rest of the staff lived in fear.

In 1907, Mr. Lee Warner persuaded him to move to the firm of Chatto & Windus, and in the same year he wrote his first novel, *The Merry Heart,* and entered it for a competition being run by Mr. Fisher Unwin. Its merit was acknowledged, but he did not win the prize. When the MS. came to the notice of Lee Warner he sent it to two readers connected with Chatto & Windus, who reported favourably upon it, and consequently it was published—just after Mr. Swinnerton's twenty-fourth birthday. It was moderately successful, but its sales were not as great as it deserved. Shortly afterwards, Lee Warner's contract with Chatto & Windus expired, and Mr. Swinnerton was offered an appointment as a reader in his place.

His second novel, *The Young Idea,* was published in 1910 and received excellent reviews. Mr. Arnold Bennett, who afterwards became one of his greatest friends, sent him a letter describing it as "profound", and Martin Seeker was sufficiently impressed by it to invite him to write a critical study of George Gissing. Better still, it brought him many valuable offers and contracts from American publishers.

One day during the Great War (in which he was unable to take part owing to a serious illness in 1914) Mr. Swinnerton was lunching with Martin Seeker and Nigel De Grey (of Heinemann's) when it was .remarked that nobody **had** ever written a book about the events of **a**

•single evening. When Seeker asked him to write a novel, Frank Swinnerton therefore decided to try to write a book of that description, and the result was *Nocturne,* which was first published in 1917 and re-issued by the Oxford University Press in the series *World's Classics* in 1937. In the introduction to the latter edition, he tells us: "Work upon *Nocturne* could only be done between eight and ten o'clock each evening, and once the book had been begun it was delivered chapter by chapter to Mr. Martin Seeker, who sent the original manuscript to the printers. On the day after the last chapter had been so dispatched the first galley proofs reached the author. Mr. Seeker said, in bringing these proofs: 'It begins well.' In bringing the second batch he said: [4]I think it's very good.' And at last he said: 'I think it's a masterpiece,' " The critics were not unanimous about it: Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells were very favourably impressed, but Bernard Shaw wrote to the author a good-natured letter describing it as "a damned dismal book about people who ought not to exist". Swinnerton himself is very modest about it, but the very fact that it now appears in the Oxford *World's Classics* is evidence of its merit. It created a furore in America, where 10,000 copies were sold in a few weeks, and it has been translated into Dutch, Swedish, French, Italian, Czech and Russian.

In 1923 he published *Young Felix** which was calmly received in this country, but was a tremendous success in America, where it was placed high in the list of his writings by the reviewers. It was probably due to this that he agreed to visit the United States lor a lecture tour that lasted three-and-a-half months, which, he says, nearly killed him. It took him "as far south as Georgia and Alabama, as far west as the Pacific Coast, as far north as Montana and New Hampshire", and brought him back to New York "thankful for the experience but determined that it should not occur again". The American pressmen gave him a hearty welcome. In his *Autobiography* he says: "One such man sent those responsible for the lecture into ecstasies of delight by running a streamer headline across his front page 'FRANK SWINNERTON JUST FOLKS' (which in what Americans call English-English means 'Frank Swinnerton One of Ourselves' or 'Not at all the American Idea of an Englishman')." In the same book he tells us that wherever he went he found "the same generous hospitality, the same over-full schedule of engagements, the courtesy, the astounding interest of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people to see and hear a speaker from England". One old lady gripped his hand and said: "Mr. Swinnerton, I've always wanted to shake hands with Arnold

Bennett. I never shall. But I reckon you're the next best thing."

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He returned to this country in March 1924, married Miss Mary Dorothy Bennett, and went to Rome for a honeymoon. They returned to the charming old house at Cranleigh, Surrey, where they now live. "Old Tokefield" was once three tiny cottages dating from the year 1600, but it was converted by Mr. John D. Clarke, the architect, into a small country residence for Mr. Lawson Wood, the comic artist, from whom Mr. Swinnerton bought it. It is a most picturesque little house, full of fine old oak, and standing in an acre of garden, in which with the aid of a gardener who has a taste for Chopin, Mr. Swinnerton grows a plentiful supply of flowers, fruit and vegetables.

"My earliest ambition, as a Cockney child," he tells us in his *Autobiography*, "was to live in a cottage in the country, with a wife, books, and a garden. The ambition has been realized. I have a wife who is charming, modest, and unselfish, a domestic wit, full of humour, and a spare-time cook so excellent that gourmets, upon hearing that she is to prepare a meal, beg to be allowed to bring their wives or mothers to partake of it. I myself have a number of minor accomplishments. The members of our staff are competent and contented, very eager to please and very good-natured. I own some thousands of books and work in a large studio in the garden which moves most other less fortunate pen-slaves to envy. And I am content. . . ."

Mr. Swinnerton's most recent books are: *Harvest Comedy* (1937), *The Two Wives* (1939), *The Fortunate Lady* (1941), *Thankless Child* (1942), and *A Woman in Sunshine* (1944).

His favourite recreations are gardening, tennis (not of the high-speed, smashing variety), music, and playing with his cats. He is not very interested in politics because "politics involve dogmas, and in my view, dogmas are the devil. I am only interested in any subject in the degree to which it *illuminates* human nature".

His novels are about ordinary people, because such people have interested him more than anything else. He does not agree with those who think that the key to happiness for all is to be found in an economic system, and he does not accept the Freudian philosophy as a complete interpretation of normal human nature. He thinks that the Freud-fed generation which is now passing will give way to something less disagreeable. .

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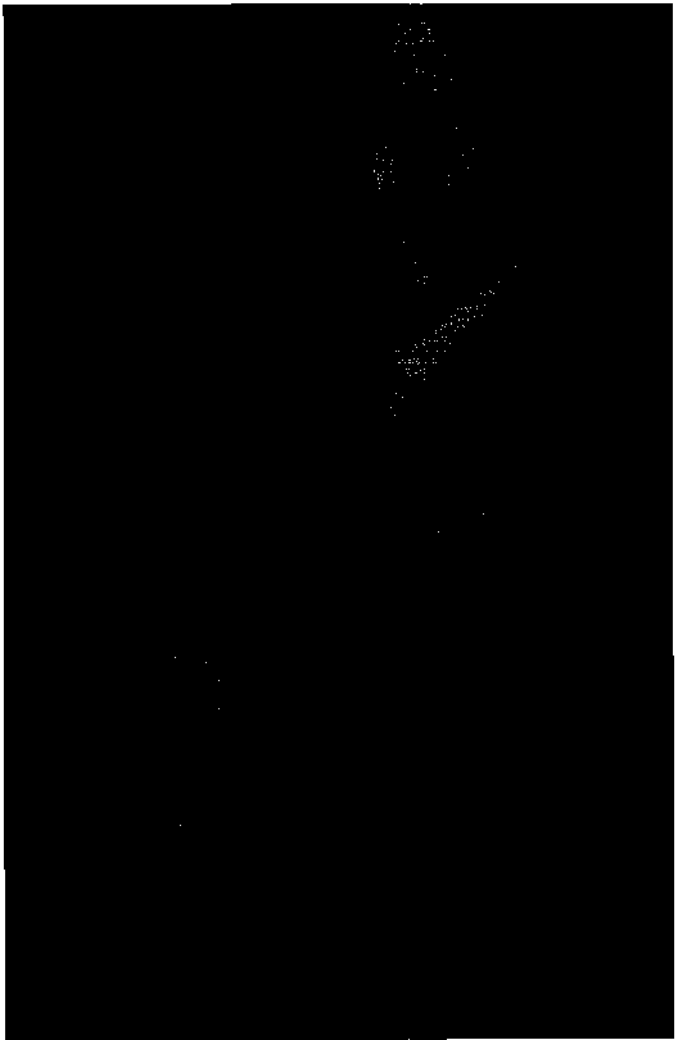
Photograph by Press Portrait Bureau

Frank Swinnerton



Photograph by Muriel Blackburn

H. A. Vachell

For six years he was the chief novel-reviewer for the *Observer,* and one of the conclusions he has drawn from his very wide experience as a literary critic is that many modern novels are unrepresentative of reality because their authors are too fond of the manners and morals of the would-be smart literary sets (in which the best writers are rarely found).

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When I asked him a few weeks ago about his views on the problems of today and tomorrow, Mr. Swinnerton said: "I am alarmed at what seems to me to be the over-zealous activity of those who want to make everything compulsory, and I feel that Sir William Beveridge has far too little understanding of the difference between being master of one's own time and working as a unit in a wholesale organization. As one who on all American earnings pays 80 per cent to the United States Treasury, and then 50 per cent of what* is left to the British Treasury, I see no chance of having (as I have always longed to have) an old age of leisure in which to learn a few things. But I rejoice to think that the object of ail the planning is greater health for all and freedom from fear of 'the sack'. And I have such belief in the natural wisdom of the British people that I think Britain will continue to be the best country in which to live, as little over-planned as any community is likely to be. I am not, however, an optimist on world affairs, as I doubt if the German question will ever be settled, and regard the complexity of moral, economic, emotional, and racial problems as something which it is beyond the power and stupidity of mankind to solve."

Since the outbreak of the present war, Mr. Swinnerton has gained a new reputation as a broadcaster, and has been heard many times in the Home and Overseas programmes. His talks on bocks have been particularly well received by the reading public.

H. A. VACHELL

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL is one **of those** veteran writers who have preferred to write good entertaining stories for the ordinary reader rather than dabble vaguely in precious obscurities for the delight of Bloomsbury. He must surely be represented on the shelves of every public and "circulating" library in the country.

He was born in **1861,** and at the age of nine was sent to a boarding school, "a hotbed of bullying, injustice and maladministration". One horrible lout found pleasure in making him swallow slugs; and the masters were not much better. "I took my thwackings as a matter of course," Mr. Vachell tells us in *Distant Fields.* "It never occurred to me to tell my mother of them till she saw my naked back with purple weals on it. Then she removed me at once."

His next school was unpleasant in quite a different manner; it had a religious atmosphere. "There were monitors who reported offenders against written and unwritten laws. The punishment I loathed was being prayed over!"

The third preparatory school to which he was sent appears to have been a remarkably well-run establishment, with rational discipline unusual in those days, and as one would expect, young Vachell was very happy there. In due course he went to Harrow, where no boy good at games could fail to find life agreeable, and many years after he drew a very rosy picture of life at this famous school in his well-known novel, *The Hill,* He learned "precious little of scholarship, although tiny seeds of that bloomed and blossomed later on". He also adds: "I blush to record that I set an inordinate value on good form rather than good manners. I regarded with horror a young man who appeared at my mother's dining table wearing a made-up white tie! It took me several years to purge myself of my deliberate mispronunciation of French1 For the rest, I have to admit that 1 left Harrow cut to the Harrow pattern, a most ordinary youth, not exactly bumptibus, but too complacently unaware of my many shortcomings. Nevertheless, I sing lustily: *Floreat Herga!"*

From Harrow he went to Sandhurst, and was ultimately commissioned in the Rifle Brigade, but resigned after a little while because ho had other interests. At the age of twenty he went to New

York, where his Harrovian accent (in which "h" is invariably substituted for "r") was the subject of comment and amusement; then he went to Chicago and San Francisco. He found California to be a •delightful country: the absence of poverty and misery captivated him. He bought a ranch, introduced polo into the country, and married Miss Lydie Chauncy Philips, the daughter of a land-owner nearby. Soon after the wedding he brought his wife to England for ten months, and while they were here he wrote his first novel, *The Princess' Naprosine,* which he burnt in manuscript after a candid friend had expressed an opinion upon it. They returned to California by way of the West Indies, Barbadoes, Panama and Mexico.

During the "slump" in California he began writing articles and short stories in his spare time, and sold one of the latter to *Scribner's Magazine* for a hundred dollars. His first published novel, *The Romance of Judge Ketchum,* he now describes as a "Curate's *egg*'\ It -was followed by *The Model of Christian Gay* in 1895. In the same year his wife died soon after the birth of their second child, a daughter to whom he gave his wife's Christian name, and he returned to England. He went back to California again for a few years, but in 1899 returned to this country for good and settled in Hampshire, at Hursley, determined to succeed professionally as a writer. "I had burnt my Californian boats," he wrote. "If my pen failed me I should be derelict."

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His pen did not fail him. He met Mr. A. P. Watt, the prominent literary agent, who advised him how to write about his experiences. But before I proceed with an outline of his literary career, I must add that what impressed him most on his return was the ignorance of "society". He met the mother of the Speaker of the House of Commons, for instance, who thought that California was part of the British Empire!

John Charity, his next book, was about the adventures of a Hampshire yeoman in California. He describes it as his "first and last historical novel", and although this book and the two that followed were only moderately successful, he was making about £400 a year with his pen in 1902.

Vachell became very interested in the village life of this country and tried to bridge the gap between the "quality" and the cottagers, so that there might be a better understanding between them. He •even sent his son to the local village school before going to Harrow,

so that he could get to **know** the village boys. In those days such unconventional procedure must have seemed almost incredible to the "County".

Brothers was Mr. Vachell's first great success. It is a splendid story of a fine-looking man who "picks the brains" of his talented younger brother, as the latter has an impediment in his speech and is unable to express his noble thoughts. His brother does it for him—but to his **own** advantage.

The Hill, which followed in 1905, was another best-seller; it went through twenty-five editions. No wonder Mr. Vachell calls these two books his "heavenly twins"! They brought him a handsome return for his work, and "fan-mail" by every post—a mixed blessing.

He joined the Garrick Club, being proposed by Anthony Hope Hawkins, and seconded by Cyril Maude. Here is one of Mr. Vachell's little anecdotes about this famous club:

"Into the lounge one afternoon marched our steward, a man of portentous delivery. He addressed us:

'Gentlemen, I have to tell you that the lavatory is on fire.'

Without hesitating for a second, Carr (J. C. Carr), imitating him to the life, said solemnly:

'Gentlemen, let us pray for those in peril on the W. C."

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Vachell's first play, *Her Son* (which also ran as a serial in *The Idler)* was accepted by Cyril Maude and first staged in Glasgow, where it was very well received. It was also successful in the provinces and in Ireland, bringing its author a steady income for three years; yet when it was put on in London, it ran at a loss! The vagaries and vicissitudes of the theatre are beyond all understanding.

His next book, *The Paladin,* which he thinks was "too popular with the general public", was later dramatized and produced at the Savoy Theatre as *The Case of Lady Camber,* and it ran for nearly a year. Following this, Mr. Gerald du Maurier appeared in *Jelfs,* which was afterwards filmed with Harry Ainley as a substitute for Mr. du Maurier. Vachell was invited to the studios when it was being made, but he felt like a lost soul, and that is perhaps why he refused two invitations to go to Hollywood. All this happened in the comfortable, confident world before the Great War. By this time Mr, Vachell had been elected to membership of the august Athenaeum, and among other things, had been invited to lecture in America; an honour which he declined.

Between **1914** and **1918 H. A.** Vachell volunteered for active service so many times that the officials at the War Office, after pointing out that men well over fifty were not required for the forces, almost succeeded in pushing him into an obscure censorship job. Happily, he was not appointed, otherwise he might never have delighted wartime London with his famous play, *Quinney's,* which entertained packed houses at the Haymarket Theatre night after night. Two additional companies adopted this play; one taking it to America and the other touring with it in the provinces. Another of his famous wartime plays was *Searchlights,* which drew large crowds to the Savoy Theatre. At one time during the Great War he had three plays running simultaneously in London, and when his only son Richard—a splendid young man—was killed in the Royal Flying Corps, he wrote: "Activities in the theatre saved me from myself." He sustained another blow soon after this, when his daughter, who had been nursing wounded soldiers, contracted septicaemia, which impaired her health for several years.

After the publication of another novel, *The Triumph of Tim* in 1916, he was tempted to forsake novel-writing and to concentrate instead upon the stage. What actually happened was just the reverse, for in recent years he has written many more books than plays. *The Soul of Susan Yellam,* written in 1918, he considers to be one of his best novels, and with *Fishpingle* and *The Disappearance of Martha Penny,* which appeared much later, it formed a notable trilogy of village life.

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Since the Great War, Mr. Vachell has lived the life of a typical country gentleman, and has given us such charming books as *Tfie Best of England, My Vagabondage, Experiences of a Bond Street Jeweller, The Old Guard Surrenders, Moonhills, When Sorrows Came, Joe Quinney s Jodie, Distant Fields* (his autobiography), *Lord Samarkand, Quinney's for Quality,* and a few others which I have yet to mention.

His lovely house, Widcombe Manor, was bought in 1924. It is known as the Gem of Bath, and stands high upon Widcombe Hill. When Mr. Vachell first went with his brother to see it, he said they stood spellbound at its gates, gazing through them "at a noble facade of stone in which golden sunsets seemed to have been euslirined". It has a lordly terrace "where all the beaux and belles of Bath paraded in the days of Richard Nash"; and in one of its rooms Fielding wrote

Tom Jones. The house so fascinated Mr. A. J. A. Symons that he urged Vachell to write a novel about it, and *Golden House* was the result.

Soon after the Vachells were comfortably installed in their "dream house", the maids all gave notice because they had been told that the house was haunted, and were quite certain that they had heard "queer noises" in the night. To set their minds at rest Mr. Vachell and his brother changed bedrooms with them for a while, but of course nothing "spooky" happened.

I I . A. Vachell then set out to explore the west country. One of his first journeys took him to Wells, where the Vicars' • Close inspired him to write *Vicars' Walk,* a delightful book about an old Cathedral and its people. He also spent many hours wandering about Bath and nearby villages, and wrote *This was England* from the material collected. "I have taken in hand other tasks (never tasks to me) since I wrote *This was England,* but none has been such an authentic labour of love as this attempt to present the England that used to be, with its legends, quaint customs and folk-lore. It pitchforked mc out of myself, out of my sanctuary, into the by-ways of our West Country. . . . No book of mine has brought me so many letters from strangers. But I swear that 1 never expected such kind recognition. After a fashion it gave the lie to what I had affirmed about the indifference of my fellow countrymen to aught that concerns yesterday; I felt rather ashamed of myself." This book was so successful that on the suggestion of Rudyard Kipling, he wrote another volume of the same type calling it *Arising out of That.*

Mr. Vachell's latest books are: *WJiere Fancy Beckons* (1938), *Phoebe's Guest House* (1939), *Great Chameleon* (1940), *Little Tyrannies* (1941), *Black Squire* (1941), *The Wheel Stood Still* (1943), and *Hilary Trent* (1944).

For two years he was President of the Dickens' Fellowship, and went about lecturing in the west of England.

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What does H. A. Vachell read? He finds good biography irresistible; he enjoys the Elizabethans; his Montaigne and Pepys are so well worn that they need rebinding; and he advises young writers to study Donne. Volumes of Hazlitt and Lamb are always near his armchair. "I find A. J. Cronin's novels enthralling, with perhaps too bitter an aftertaste. Francis Brett Young distils a sweet reasonableness which Matthew Arnold would have commended. On Priestley

has fallen the mantle of Dickens. ... I love my accomplished friend Rebecca West; I chuckle over E. M. Delafield's sly humour; and I have enthroned Rose Macaulay on a pedestal where I hope that her future meditations will not be fancy-free. I admire much in the work of our brilliant younger writers, but I charge some of them with an overstraining after effect and a disregard of the decencies. . . . The Immortals wrote for all time. ... I cannot pass through Somerset without recalling lines from *UAllegro,* or visit Tintern without thinking of Wordsworth."

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When I asked Mr. Vachell for his views on present-day problems, he told me that as a nation we were at the mercy of our sedentary sentimentalists as regards both social and international affairs. After the last war, he said, they cooed a protest against any form of reprisals. "We turned our cheek to the enemy, and he spat on it. Once a Hun, always a Hun!" Mr. Vachell declared, "The man whom our Prime Minister describes as a bloodthirsty guttersnipe has told us what he intended to do if Might triumphed over Right. Britons were to become the helots of the Herrenvolk. Do the mothers in all English-speaking countries realize that their children will have to face another world war if we deal leniently with our enemies this time?" Mr. Vachell told me of a lady of his acquaintance who, when discussing the atrocities being committed in all the occupied countries, mucmured, "May God forgive them, for they know not what they do." But Mr. Vachell insists that these apostles of Kultur and the New Order *do* know what they do, and what they have done in the past they will do again and again if perverted sentiment rolls commonsense in the dust.

He has no faith whatever in a State monopoly of Industry. "The State is supreme over Army, Navy and Air Force," he reminded mc. "Do our Left-wingers propose to pay the same wretched wages to factory workers as are paid to the men who have fought to win thic war? These gentlemen approve of the Atlantic Charter, in which c clause provides that the seven seas shall remain open to victors and vanquished alike. Are our workers prepared to accept a minimum wage for a maximum of work, which they must do if they are to compete on equal terms in the world's markets against Germans and Japs?"

Mr. Vachell declares that it is a lie to affirm that great industrialists have no bowels of compassion for their workers, and cites

such people as the late Lord Leverhulme, the Frys, the Wills family, and many others who have demonstrated that it pays to consider the rank and file. "Let the State control the activities of the few in the interest of the many. Let the State see to it that power is not abused."

"I have a profound faith in individual initiative, resource and executive ability," Mr. Vachell told me. "I believe in an unselfish aristocracy of intelligence. I believe that boys at school who display authentic aptitude for any work should be given every opportunity to add cubits to. their stature. I don't believe in ramming square pegs into round holes. Too much money has already been squandered over attempting to educate boys and girls who forget the little they learned at school as soon as they leave it."

He is not in favour of a compulsory State Medical Service: "I cannot envisage busy men and women standing in a queue awaiting their turn in a clinic. Are our great hospitals supported by voluntary subscriptions to be financed by the State?"

He thinks that much of the criticism levelled at our great and famous public schools is unfair, and deplores the efforts of misguided people who would sweep away these ancient foundations.

In reply to my request for his opinions on the Beveridge Report, Mr. Vachell sent me the following little resume, which I will use as a postscript to complete the picture of him.

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Comments on the Beveridge Report, by H. A. Vachell.

The Beveridge Report, according to Sir William, will exact criticism and suggestions from the best brains in the kingdom. *Where are these specialized brains?* Not so very long ago, a famous international banker told me that "high finance" was so curiously complicated that in his considered opinion, only some half-dozen men in all the world could deal faithfully with it. He mentioned no names. If this be partially true, the ordinary man in the street dares not even discuss this Report. But I have been asked to give my personal opinion, which I do reluctantly.

I admit that it is impossible to make an omelette without breaking eggs, particularly nest-eggs. After this war, the dyed-in-the-wool reactionary will be constrained to reconsider all pre-war valuations. Sir William invites us to take part in the old game of *General Post.* He advocates an equality which threatens individual liberty. As a nation we shall cease to be democratic and become bureaucratic.

Every official drest with authority will deem himself the superior, not the equal, of the underlings. Again, any menace to private property will enrage the small property owner more, I submit, than the man of many acres. He probably will be glad to be quit of overwhelming cares and responsibilities. Acres are an anagram of cares.

Wisely, Sir William deprecates hasty judgment and action. Assurance is not insurance. We do not yet know the cost of this war. None can doubt Sir William's sincerity. But it seems to me tliat he is inviting us to bite off more than we can chew. The Report, as a whole, is destructive rather than reconstructive. It imperils individual initiative. It is an epitome of wishful thinking; it appeals speciously to the millions who cannot think except in terms of self-interest. Does it promise more than it can perform?

H. A. V

H. G. WELLS

THE position of Mr. H. G. Wells in the world of letters to-day is unique. There is nobody quite like him. Who else has produced such a range of highly imaginative literature, such an amazing flood of ideas, and yet at the same time has succeeded in portraying character with the skill of an artist? This does not mean that his books are beyond criticism; it is not difficult to find fault with them, and they are not written to conform with any of the strict artistic ideals of the aesthetes; but they have enormously enriched the literature of this nation, and I have good reason for believing that they will outlive much of the work of the fashionable intellectuals of to-day who pretend to despise them. Mr. Coinpton Mackenzie has gone so far as to say that H. G. Wells has had a more profound and a more extensive influence upon English life and upon English literature than any other writer of the twentieth century.

Herbert George Wells is a man of humble origin. His father had a precarious china and hardware business, and his mother was in domestic service before her marriage. It was in a room over the little shop in Bromley, Kent, that he was born on September 21, 1866. His first school was a tiny private establishment in a cottage run by an unqualified old lady, but somehow he managed to learn to read and write, and in due course proceeded to another private school of a slightly higher standard in the Bromley High Street. It was kept by an elderly Dickensian character whose teaching was "antiquated, pretentious, superficial and meagre". Even so, Wells seemed to acquire a passably good education of an elementary type, which was more than he would have received at the appallingly deficient Church and National Schools of those days. "The Education Act of 1871," he declares, "was not an Act for a common universal education, it was an Act to educate the lower classes for employment on lower class lines. . . ."

Even in his childhood his views were unorthodox; he felt there was something very wrong with the popular conception of the Deity. He prayed only very occasionally but when he did, he expected a prompt answer. In his *Autobiography* he tells us of one occasion on which he prayed for assistance in overcoming some difficulty in an examination paper, but he did not receive the desired enlightenment

and at the end of the period allotted for answering the paper, he declared in indignation, "All right, God. Catch me praying again."

At an early age he was apprenticed to a draper in Windsor, but hated the work and was unable to take the slightest interest in it. Later, he became a chemist's assistant, a position much more to his liking, as he enjoyed working in the atmosphere of a dispensary. To his dismay, he found that the cost of qualifying was beyond the means of his parents, and he reluctantly left the profession. For a few months he returned to school, going as a boarder to Midhurst Grammar School, but the possibility of getting the type of work he required seemed very remote, and once again he was compelled to enter the drapery trade, this time at a shop in Southsca which was definitely superior to the one at Windsor. All the same, the move was ill-advised, for he again found the obsequious life with its monotonous petty routine to be intolerable; and although he managed to endure it for two years, he broke away from it again when he suddenly received an offer to go back to Midhurst. Grammar School as an unqualified assistant teacher. What a blessing this proved to be! Not only was the life pleasant and interesting, but it gave him an excellent opportunity to continue his own studies, and he worked diligently at a wide range of subjects, in which science figured prominently.

It was at this period of his life that he pondered over the problems of religion, and found the orthodox doctrines of the churches to be quite unconvincing. No sooner had he come to this decision than he learned with disgust that the statutes of the school required every member of the teaching staff to be a communicant of the Church of England, and he was presented with what amounted to an ultimatum by the governors. His position was critical. If he had thrown up his job he would certainly have had to face unemployment indefinitely, for an unqualified teacher with little experience and agnostic tendencies stood very little chance of getting even the most humble situation. On the other hand, to remain at the school would have meant submitting to the rite of confirmation and becoming an exemplary churchman. Bitterly resentful, he decided upon the latter course, and was "prepared" by the local curate, who tried in vain to answer his barrage of questions concerning the Church s attitude towards evolution and kindred subjects. Sacerdotalism and all its ramifications were repulsive to his clear-thinking scientific mind, but with a great deal of self-control he survived the ceremony of confirmation, and the subsequent communions. "The wound to my private honour smarted for a long time," he declares in his *Auto-*

biography, "and it was many years before I could forgive the church for setting these barriers of conformity in my way to social usefulness."

His release was not long delayed, for he was fortunate in winning a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in South Kensington (now the Royal College of Science) with a maintenance grant of one guinea a week. His joy was complete when he learned that he would be studying biology under the eminent Professor Huxley.

His studies during the next three years were, of course, of inestimable value in his later life, but he allowed himself to diverge too much from the prescribed course, and actually failed in his final examinations, so that he left without gaining his degree. He lived first in lodgings at West bourne Park, but they rapidly deteriorated, and he moved to a somewhat superior boarding house in Euston Road.

His next teaching post was in a very poor type of private school in Wales, where he had his first experience of illness brought about by congestion of the lungs. It did not prove to be serious, and he soon recovered, leaving the school and returning to London to become an assistant master at Henley House School in Kilburn. This was a fairly congenial position, but he did not remain there tor more than about two years, as he received a more attractive offer from the principal of University Correspondence College, Cambridge, to become a tutor. He accepted it, resuming his own studies at the same time, so that in 1890 he succeeded in getting his B.Sc. with first-class honours in zoology, and second-class honours in geology.

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Having established himself in a moderately remunerative position, he married his cousin Isabel on October 81, 1891, at Wandsworth Parish Church. In less than five years the marriage proved to be a failure and it was dissolved. He then married one of his pupils, Amy Catherine Robbins, who also qualified later as a B.Sc, and who gave him an enormous amount of assistance in his work. In his *Autobiography* he says that he lived with her for a period before their marriage, as both of them were opposed to conventional marriage, but their neighbours became indignant and began to ostracise them, so they had their union legalized simply to stop the scandal-mongers. A more capable wife would have been very hard to find; for years she acted as his secretary, typing his manuscripts, correcting his proofs, •dealing with his correspondence, and assisting in research, as well as

carrying out her household duties. Her domestic servants were devoted to her. She was a small, fair-haired woman with very fine features. Her manner was quiet and retiring, and she gave the impression that her sole object in life was to relieve her husband of all the little anxieties and trivialities that beset men in his position.

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The first book ever to be published under the name of H. G. Wells was a modest little textbook of biology; but he soon started contributing articles to the *Pall Mall Gazette,* and thus commenced his literary career. His income was anything but stable during those early years, in fact it was not until he had established himself as an author by the publication of *The Time Machine* that he became free from financial anxieties.

In 1895 he had an opportunity to write dramatic criticism, and' came into contact for the first time with Bernard Shaw, who was then in his thirties. They found they had much in common, and although in later years there have been signs of good-natured rivalry between them, their friendship continues to this day. *The War of the World; Wheels of Chance* and *The Invisible Man* all appeared at about this time, and since then Wells has maintained a steady flow of books, all teeming with "new and explosive ideas", as Mr. Swinnerton calls them. By the end of the nineteenth century he was famous, for his scientific romances caught the imagination of the public at a time of tremendous development in the use of electricity and the internal combustion engine. In 1900 he published *Anticipations,* an attempt to forecast the future of civilization as it would appear in the present century. Upon this, and upon such books as *A Modern Utopia* and *Mankind in the Making* he built up his reputation as a great reformer; he showed an astonished community what it should strive to accomplish. To-day as we plan the reconstruction of civilization we see that those bold plans were not mere fantasies of an imaginative mind. He has always believed in a World State, free of the intrigues of nationalism, free of monarchies and peerages, a State in which science is the servant of all mankind, and in which the intellectuals form the only aristocracy.

Kipps, in which a draper's assistant inherits—and loses—a fortune, was published in 1905, and *Tono-Bungay,* his masterpiece of fiction, was written in 1909. Of the latter, Mr. Frank Swinnerton in his excellent book, *The Georgian Literary Scene,* says: "It is a really amazing picture ... of the change that occurred in English life be-

tween the author's childhood and his maturity. It is contemporary history. Its vigour never fails; its detail, both domestic and social, is -exact and sufficient. It is absorbingly interesting; it was a genuine attempt to present a modern man at something like full length in spite of every moral convention of the time."

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In 1916 Wells visited the front lines in France, an experience which resulted in his invention of the mobile telpherage system, which was officially adopted after he had explained it personally to Mr. Winston Churchill, but it was not used to any great extent because the "brass hats" were prejudiced against it! It is also interesting to recall that in 1903—yes, as long ago as that—Mr. Wells described in the *Strand Magazine* his idea for the use of tanks in warfare. I do not think he actually referred to them as "tanks", but he described heavily Armoured motor vehicles carrying guns of substantial size, and during the Great War repeatedly drew attention to the use that could be made of such vehicles. But it was not until 1916 that the War Office would condescend even to entertain the idea, and even when the[4] tanks had achieved remarkable successes on the battlefields, there were still generals who disliked using them! No wonder Mr. Wells Tefers to the Great War as "All Fools' War".

It was also in 1916 that he published *Mr. Britling Sees it Through,* an extremely well drawn picture of England during the Great War, which did much to establish his reputation in America. The following year saw the publication of *War and the Future,* which the Censor conveniently expurgated "to save rather the prestige of the military authorities than the country". But Wells was much too clever for him. He promptly burnt the "blue-pencilled" proofs, and took to the publishers a clean set, which he solemnly declared had been passed by the Censor, so that to the horror of certain officials, the book was published in its original form. There was much bureaucratic bitterness.

That the nation should return to its pre-war stupidity in 1919 was a sickening disappointment to H. G. Wells, who hoped (as he hopes to-day) for some signs of an intelligent reconstruction. Even the peace celebrations appalled him. In his *Autobiography* he complains, •'The monarchy . . . went in state through the beflagged streets of London, unashamed amidst a blaze of uniforms and a great blare of military music, to thank our dear old Anglican Trinity, Who had •been, it seems, in control throughout, in St. Paul's Cathedral."

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His famous *Outline of History,* first published in 1920 in fortnightly parts, was one of his most remarkable books, and something like three million copies have been sold. *A Short History of the World* followed two years later. In 1926 he published *The World of William Clissold,* a fictitious biography in three volumes, which contains a great deal of his own philosophy. Many real characters appear in it, including Jung and G. Bernard Shaw.

Perhaps his most popular work in recent times was *The Shape of Things to Come,* a most dramatic novel of the future, written in 1933 And subsequently made into a film. It predicted a war very much like the present one with all the horror of aerial bombardment, and a Utopian State afterwards. Most people have vivid recollections of the film, and even if we do not find ourselves sitting in glass chairs when the war is over, we shall certainly expect some of the reforms that Wells envisaged.

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In person, Wells is a trifle disappointing as far as appearances are concerned; he is a most ordinary-looking man of average height; slightly stout; and has a rather tanned complexion and sharp, blue eyes. He has a small, high-pitched voice, which is apt to become shrill when he gets excited. His friends find his incredibly quick sense of humour as entertaining as his gift of mimicry, and he can converse as easily with a tramp as with a university professor. For many years he lived in a fine old Georgian house known as "Easton Glebe" in Essex, but the death of his wife in 1927 upset him so much that he was unable to continue to live there, and he moved to his town house near Regent's Park, where he still resides.

When Mrs. Wells was alive he was very fond of entertaining, and his week-end parties drew every imaginable type of person to Easton Glebe. Mr. Frank Swinnerton, one of his more frequent guests, describes these week-ends as "whirls of unceasing activity", with Wells personally leading the games ranging from lawn tennis, hockey, quoits and dancing to bridge "and a frightful pastime known as Demon Patience". He had a huge barn fitted with a polished floor for dancing, but it was used primarily for the celebrated Ball Game of his own invention—a Wellsian form of Badminton. But you have not heard the whole story yet. At the end of the day, after an astonishingly full programme of entertainment, his guests were expected to take part in charades, which, of course, were on a grand scale, with an endless supply of costumes thoughtfully provided by Mrs.

Wells. According to Mr. Swinnerton, you could dress as anything,, from an Arab sheik to a pound of sausages.

Mr. Wells is a great admirer of Mr. Roosevelt, whom he has frequently visited. In his *Autobiography* he says of the President: "He is bold and unlimited in his objectives, because his mental arms are long and his courage great. ..."

Some years ago, Wells went to Moscow to meet Stalin, whom he found to be friendly and, at first, rather shy. "I have never met a man more candid, fair and honest," he declares, adding that everybody in Russia trusts him implicitly.

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Now 1 come to Mr. Wells's views on the problems of Reconstruction. This is where I sit back and wonder how on earth I can tell you in a few pages of this great man's hopes for the new civilization when the dictators have been brought to justice. I am going to start by advising those who are interested to read his book, *Phoenix,* which was published last year by Messrs. Seeker & Warburg. It is significant that in this book, which he describes as "A Summary of the Inescapable Conditions of World Reorganization", he admits the possibility that mankind may not be able to produce the necessary mental and moral energy to bring about the changes he desires.

At the outset, he endorses the *Declaration of Human Rights* which was drawn up a few years ago by a group of liberal thinkers under the chairmanship of Lord Sankey. This forms an Appendix to his book, and the primary considerations outlined constitute the threefold imperatives which in Mr. Wells's opinion a world revolution must obey:

"First, the establishment of an overriding federal world control of transport and inter-State communications throughout the entire world.

Secondly, the federal conservation of world resources, and

Thirdly, the subordination of all the federated States of the world to a common fundamental law."

He then gives us *A Short History of War and Human Inequality* in which he tells us (among many other interesting things) *Why Generals Deteriorate.* From his criticisms of the use made of the British Army during the early years of the present war you gain the impression that H. G. Wells would not be a very welcome visitor at the War office at the present time. I can quote only a little:

"Blunder has followed blunder. The men have been splendid. The

Photograph by Manntll

H. G. Wells

Photograph by Howcrd Coster

Francis Brett Young

common soldiers fought their way out from Belgium when the generals had fairly and squarely lost the war. The Kentish longshoremen rescued an army its generals had left behind. Nothing like this incompetence discredits our other arms. Our Air Force goes on from strength to strength, the Navy and Mercantile Marine are glorious rivals, even our charwomen are heroines, and the man.in the street is invincible. But the War Office stuck in the mud. The common sense of raiding, the obvious methods, the ABC of raising the Continent against Jerry, were explained to these people over and over again, and they pretended not to hear. They were, as far as they could manage it, doing nothing while the Russians bled for us." From this Wells concludes that class sabotage and powerful influences hostile both to Russia and democracy were holding back any British counter-attack in the west, but he does not consider that any of the military leaders were guilty of disloyalty, for: "Except for a few Mosleyite half-wits among them, their worst offence is that they are antiquated, dull and prejudiced." We have to rid ourselves of the "encumbering old gentlemen" who still hold back our full national energy, he tells us, though he admits the difficulty in quietly disposing of them. "We can hardly set them to dig for victory because most of them no longer hinge at the middle; few are sufficiently alert and decorative to stand outside cinemas, and they would probably be more inclined to insist upon salutes and passwords than to facilitate admission.
But he thinks they might be dropped by parachute into Germany to create over-confidence in the enemy!

Wells insists that there must be no genteel exile for Hitler and his hooligans when the war is over. They must go to the hangman and firing squad. "A few score thousand criminals need to be shot that thereafter the millions may live in peace. V for Vengeance. The millions are no longer dumb, driven cattle."

One of his chief criticisms of the Services to-day is that discipline is abused, and that there is still far too much snobbishness. He is particularly indignant at the distinction drawn between pilot officers and sergeant pilots in the RAF, mentioning in *Phoenix* an absurd letter published in *The Times* of December 1, 1041, from a correspondent who believed that it was bad for morale that pilot officers and sergeant pilots should mess together.

He dislikes party politics, believing that the New World can be built without a party, because the necessary revolution should have the support of "every properly instructed, constructive and lucid-minded man". He also appreciates "the necessity of using power for

the overthrow and permanent suppression of mastery and aggressive violence" which would mean the "transformation of all the armies and militant services in the world, all the police, prisons, and criminal and international law" into a nexus of restraint.

When the great Reorganization has been accomplished, Wells recognizes that there will be no place for Major-General Blimp, Bill Sikes, the prostitutes of Piccadilly, the journalistic fortune tellers, Rural Deans and suchlike, but if you want to know what he would do with them, you must read *Phoenix* and find out for yourself.

In the same book he states his case against the war profiteers, the great banking interests, and "Big Business" in its more objectionable form, and makes some good points.

To some extent, the community will have to be re-educated, and he reminds us of the not inconsiderable number of mothers in East London who, after the serious air-raids, refused the free distribution of fruit juices for their children, because they disliked "charity". He declares "We have to convert this sort of pride in poverty-stricken independence into pride in being joint owner and joint worker in a classless community. That has been done in Russia in the brief interval since 1917. In that year, Russia was a shattered, devastated and half-conquered medievalism. She had eighty per cent illiterates, and the evil shadow of the serf mentality still lay upon the older generation. Consider the Russia of to-day. If that transformation can be worked in Russia, by the establishment of the public ownership of the means of production and distribution, and the abolition of fragmentary competitive private ownership, it can be done as speedily or more speedily in any country in the world."

While he is on the subject of education, Wells demands that there must be no sectarian teaching of religion in schools. He believes in complete religious freedom for everybody, and insists that children should be taught only "the plain, clear realities of life", so that when they grow up they can decide the question of religion for themselves with open minds which have been trained to think logically. He is also in favour of a common schooling for all adolescents, "where the only classification should be one of natural aptitude as the schoolboys approach the age of specialization".

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Mr. H. G. Wells has no use for the Christian moral code of the churches, preferring the Russian system, where there is no bar to a woman having a child by a nameless father if she cares to do so,

where there is nothing to prevent her having a lover without having children if that is her disposition, and where there is no prostitution. "The Church," he declares, "insists upon a ceremonial marriage under its auspices, and, in order to ensure that end, it has not hesitated to inflict the most outrageous disadvantages, ostracisms and cruelties upon the women and innocent children; ... it enforces the 'rights'of the man over the woman, it assures him proprietorship of his children, it condones his infidelities. The woman pays."

Mr. Wells believes that we are on the threshold of a new sexual freedom in which women will enjoy equality and freedom of action. Intelligent, responsible women who desire to have children will not necessarily be bound to endure humiliation in the scramble to find husbands, and there will be very little repression and perversion.

Blood sports are particularly detestable to Mr. Wells; he has no use for people who cannot amuse themselves without destroying something or chasing it to death. In his New World, to quote again from *Phoenix*, "the gentleman killer will no longer be on the bench when the poacher killer comes up for judgment; he will be in the dock beside him".

To conclude, I must emphasize Wells's belief that if there is to be any reasonable order at all after the war, we must make up our minds to come to a proper understanding with the Man of Destiny (as he calls him)—Joseph Stalin. Next, the British conservative forces (the financiers, the court, the county and the vicarage, the old universities and the public schools) must make a frank and honourable peace with the common people of this country, for whom Wells has a tremendous admiration. Then there will be some possibility of our enjoying the freedom for which we are fighting.

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If, as 1 suspect, you are dissatisfied with my "sketch", I can only advise you to sit down and read all his books from cover to cover; but do so with an open mind, and then, even if you are not converted to the Wellsian way of thinking, you will not, at any rate, have been bored.

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

IN Francis Brett Young's famous novels of the Black Country and of the more pastoral areas that have just escaped the grime of industry, we find the little town of *Ilatesby,* where humble folk once spent their lives in the private manufacture of nails. In reality, of course, it is Hales Owen; just a few miles to the south-west of Birmingham, and not very far from the first of the Welsh hills. Here, in a comfortable red brick house in 188*, Francis Brett Young was born, the son of a doctor who had spent the best part of his life administering to the toiling families around him. Within easy walking distance is Walton Hill (the *Ujfdoxtn* of the novels) where the doctor's son found some consolation in scrambling up its slopes until from its windswept heights he could peer into the valleys of Wales. To most people, a small working-class town is one of the least inspiring sights o! the English landscape, yet it was in this environment that Mr. Brett Young found the soul of the industrial Midlands.

He was educated at Epsom College, where he soon developed a taste for literature, which did not, it should be noted, "go to his head", although he did edit the school magazine very successfully for a considerable time. Although he wanted to go to Oxford and study English literature, he was compelled to follow his father into the medical profession, and went to Birmingham University, where as a student he ran an undergraduates' magazine, and took a keen interest in poetry.

While he was there he met Miss Jessie Hankinson of Alvechurch, and they soon found that they had more in common than their love of poetry. Both were keen amateur musicians; he was rapidly becoming an excellent pianist, while she was discovering that she possessed a singing voice of quality and power; so they decided to give recitals together.

When Mr. Brett Young qualified as a physician and surgeon in 1906, he made up his mind to see the Far East. To do this, he obtained an appointment as a ship's doctor, and visited both China and Japan; but if we are to judge from the fact that there is practically no mention of either of these countries in his books, it appears that the voyage made no great impression upon him. I think, too, we may safely assume that the memories of music-making in Birmingham were

pulling at him, for he returned to this country very quickly, and in 1908 married Miss Hankinson, settling down in a general practice at Brixham, South Devon. They were both fond of this picturesque little harbour town on the shores of Torbay, and in his second novel, *Deep Sea,* we find the results of his contacts with the local fishermen.

The Dark Tower was perhaps the most outstanding of his earlier books, but its merits were not generally acknowledged until four or five years after its first publication, when it began to sell in considerable numbers. He wrote it just before the Great War.

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In 1915' he joined the RAMC as a surgeon and was sent to East Africa, where he attained the rank of Major. Even under the stress of heavy military duties, carried out in an almost intolerable climate, he continued to write, and produced a book of poems called *Five Degrees South,* besides laying the foundations of two splendid novels, *Marching on Tanga* and *The Crescent Moon,* which were both published in 1918. Unfortunately, he was stricken with malaria, and had to be sent back to England lor a period of convalescence, after which he served as a Registrar at the Tidworth military hospital. When peace returned, the effects of the disease were still telling upon him, and he was obliged to move his home to Capri, where he settled for several years in the company of various other writers who had responded to the call of the sun, including D. H. Lawrence and Compton Mackenzie.

Woodsmoke and *Pilgrim's Rest* were the result of a visit to South Africa in 1922.

His *Portrait of Clare,* written in 1927, was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and then followed *My Brother Jonathan* in 1928, *Black Roses* in 1929, *Jim Redlake* in 1930, *Mr. db Mrs. Pennington* in 1981, and *The Hopse Under the Water* in 1932. The last named was inspired by the construction of the great dam in the Elan Valley, in the middle of Wales, for the water supply to Birmingham *(North Bromwich).*

Mr. and Mrs. Brett Young returned to their native county in 1933, when they purchased the beautiful Craycombe House, near Pershore. It is a dignified residence surrounded by lovely old-world gardens and magnificent trees. In this perfect setting, Mr. Brett Young has produced most of his later books, including *This Little World* (1934),

White Ladies (1935), *Far Forest* (1936), *They Seek a Country* (1937), *Dr. Bradley Remembers* **(1938)** and *The City of Gold* (1939).

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The present war brought great changes to Craycombe House. Our Worcestershire author gave his home to the British Red Cross Association for the duration of the war, and it is now in use as a soldiers' hospital. Mr. Brett Young is now living temporarily near Looe, in Cornwall, but his work still goes on. *Mr. Lucton's Freedom* and *Cotsuold Honey* were produced in 1940, *A Man about the House* in 1942, and *The Island* in 194 A.

Mr. Francis Brett Young is a great friend of the people of Worcestershire. He understands them perfectly, and shares their love of a charming county. He is always willing to help in the preservation of its beauty, for he is essentially a countryman. He usually wears tweeds, and loves to walk in the country lanes smoking his pipe; a typical country gentleman of average height, with a healthy complexion and brown hair. If you were a Worcestershire farmer he would listen to all your tales of woe with a genuine feeling of sympathy, because he is keenly interested in agriculture and grows a great deal of fruit himself. Although he has a scholarly face, he has none of the airs and graces oi the "literary set", but if you changed the topic of your conversation from top-dressings to new novels, he would tell you with boyish glee of some fearfully complicated new story he had in mind, and you would have to sit there on a stile while he explained everything in detail.

He still plays the piano—when his dogs don't want him to play with them—and is a keen cricketer. He is always very disappointed if he has to miss a match in which the Worcestershire Cricket Club is playing, because he is himself one of its most enthusiastic members. I understand that when somebody once told him that he wrote as well as Jack Hobbs played cricket, he was more delighted than he would have been with any amount of favourable literary criticism.

Unlike many of his contemporaries in the world of letters, he takes no active part in politics. This does not mean, of course, that he is indifferent towards the welfare of his fellow men. Far from it; he has studied humanity too closely to be unconcerned about it; but I believe he feels that with all its faults, this country is now on the right road to social justice, and that it is best left in the hands of the men who are proving themselves to be worthy leaders of the people in these difficult times.

I believe he trusts Winston Churchill not only with the prosecution of the war, but with the reconstruction of European civilization. He agrees with most of the greater writers of to-day that we must encourage international goodwill after the war by doing everything within our power to promote the exchange of both ideas and artistic creations, particularly between the English-speaking nations, Russia and "de-Hitlerized" Germany. He is opposed to "propaganda novels", believing that the spirit of the peoples, as expressed by their writers, must speak for itself.

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Although his early books were enthusiastically reviewed, they did not enjoy large sales for many years. For some unaccountable reason, the public were slow to appreciate the quality of his work, and it was not until the *Portrait of Clare* appeared that he enjoyed the success he deserved. Since then his sales have been enormous, and until the outbreak of the present war, his books were translated into most of the European languages. He told me recently that in his opinion the works of British writers have always been well treated and well read on the continent; except in France, where he considers that the more intelligent classes were too arrogant, and in Italy "where thejr are not interested in books in any language—not even their own"'.

Miss Grace Cranston, of Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., has very kindly given me some "inside information" on the method Mr. Brett Young employs when writing his books. Like most authors, he writes every day whether he is "in the mood" or not, and he does a great deal of work upon a novel before he writes even the first word of it. He ponders over the story, turning it over and over again in his mind, and tries to imagine that he is actually living with the characters he intends to introduce. He builds a scaffolding, not of poles, but of little note-books, in which he makes charts of the characters—even minor ones—carefully recording the minutest details. The length of the novel is always decided in advance, and then so-many thousand words are allocated to each part of the story, so that the narrative never gets out of hand. All the time he has in mind the "melodic outline" of the book, to ensure that each chapter is the correct length, and strikes the right note. Here, I think, is one of the secrets of his success, for his novels are extremely well constructed, and compare favourably with the ragged effusions of some of our modern writers.

He tries with all his skill to communicate through the written word

his own "ridiculously consuming love" for England **and** its lovely countryside, and to express his admiration and tenderness for its people. Everyone who reads his books must be conscious of this, for his love of the pastoral scene—particularly the green country of the Severn valley—proclaims itself triumphantly and tenderly in every line he writes.

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This particular sketch is too short, for I would gladly write a couple of hundred pages about Francis Brett Young. It would be a pleasure to do so. There are about half-a-dozen novelists whose books I prefer to buy than borrow, because I like to feel that they are always near at hand. He is one of them. I cannot tell you much more about him because he is one of those modest, retiring people who simply hate talking about themselves. He lives a quiet, simple life, and dislikes the limelight of publicity; but through his books we can learn to understand him, so I am concluding with a quotation from *The Times Literary Supplement,* which, 1 think, is appropriate:

"Francis Rrctt Young is very richly endowed. His power to make of landscape a protagonist of his drama, his knowledge of widely separated classes of society and of the detail of their life and work, an interest in mankind so patient that it will permit him no bitterness even at the expense of those to whom he is opposed, his care for music, for poetry, for fishing, his admiration for the heroic virtues, and the steady unaffected integrity of his own mind, give him a very wide range. He has, too, a virtue nowadays rare among artists of his rank—the virtue of loving more than he despises and of not scorning to learn from and write about ordinary men and women. All these things have been poured into his novels.'*