

Russia; and Plato's ideas on civic liberties were not very different from Stalin's or Hitler's. But perhaps Mr. Robinson is confident that when the unemployed have been disfranchised and the Guardians take charge of the destinies of America, the right men will be on top—strongly acquisitive, no doubt, but tolerant and self-restrained.

So rich men hoped and believed in Germany and Italy, before they got the government they had wanted. The danger that American rich men might be turned in the same direction by Mr. Robinson's book, to their own disaster as well as the country's, is the only reason for treating it as anything but a reduction to the absurd.

History in Quotation

ENGLAND'S YEARS OF DANGER. By Paul Frischauer. New York: Oxford University Press. 1938. \$2.75.

MR. FRISCHAUER'S novel, "A Great Lord," which appeared last winter, was something more than just another variation on the Napoleonic theme. Its studied and always pertinent detail, its confident and skillful interpretation of disputed issues, showed that its author had made himself thoroughly at home in the period which he was describing. How omnivorous his reading was is now shown again in this attractive and ingenious book, which presents the complete drama of Napoleon's rise and fall in the actual words of the chief actors and the spectators.

It is a magnificent scrapbook. Its compiler wastes few words on introduction or explanation. He leaves all that to the documents themselves and to the dexterity with which he can arrange them, but he has left no possible evidence unexamined. Newspapers, parliamentary reports, military despatches, letters, memoirs, anything that was written on the spot and that carries the unmistakable stamp of freshness, are material for his scissors and paste. An obscure observer at the Russian court is quoted with as much effect as is Napoleon himself. Napoleon's public statement at some crisis is followed by Fouché's private comment. Each extract is chosen not only to further the story but also to bring to the front, if but for a moment, another and often completely divergent point of view.

The result of such a method is history in its most dramatic form, history to which the historian's comment is quite superfluous. It is all source material which, when handled as it is here with judicious brevity and telling contrast, can be the most vivid and absorbing reading. It is as breathless as a rapid novel and far more convincing because it is so compellingly genuine. There is no biography of Napoleon, no history of the First Empire, which in like space can touch this compilation for sheer excitement.

Living in a Nightmare

THE WOMAN WHO COULD NOT DIE.

By Iulia de Beausobre. New York: The Viking Press. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EUGENE LYONS

THIS is a prison memoir, an account of horrors infinitely compounded, as Mrs. Iulia de Beausobre's delicate body and sensitive mind are dragged through nine months of G.P.U. prison (three of them in solitary confinement) and eleven months of a Soviet penal camp. Yet an eery beauty hovers over the strange and passionate story, tempering and at times blotting out the horror. It is the beauty of the author's compassion, for the myriad fellow-sufferers around her, the keepers, even for her uniformed examiners. She has fashioned a delicate and utterly human document out of the rough and sadistic materials of a typical Soviet persecution of a "class enemy."

The author and her husband belonged to the class of "pre-revolutionary intellectuals," which in the early 1930's in the U.S.S.R. was almost a crime in itself. In January, 1933, Nicolay, her husband, "went out to work as usual in the morning and never came back." A week later "they" came for her, too. She was never to learn what crimes they were suspected of having committed, but few of the women "politicals" (as distinguished

from the ordinary criminals) knew what suspicion or denunciation or indiscreet remark wrecked their lives.

Long months of "solitary," then the companionship of other victims, when "the cell fills with the intolerably alert silence of a number of converging agonies," in the Inner Prison of the G.P.U. headquarters in Moscow—the prison which the inmates called Palace of Torture. A few weeks in the infamous Bourtirky prison, among hundreds of underworld women, bewildered peasant women, terrorized ex-aristocrats and intellectuals, herded together under inhuman conditions. Finally the sprawling forced-labor camp, where thousands live under the whip and political convicts are singled out for special persecution.

Mrs. de Beausobre fights off death and insanity, which surely overwhelm those without a desperately tenacious will to live and to retain their minds. She is sustained by the determination to find her husband some day—though she is not astonished to learn, after her own release, that he had been shot for some "imaginary offense."

It is not in the physical facts that the power of this book resides, and it does have power, but in the reflection of a remarkable woman's feelings and poetic intuitions. After her release, and months of wandering as an "illegal person," she is ransomed out of Russia by an Englishwoman, and it is in England that she writes her memoir.

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Sheep-Counting vs. Phenobarbital

YOU CAN SLEEP WELL. By Edmund Jacobson, M.D. New York: Whittlesey House. 1938. \$2.

SLEEP! The Secret of Greater Power and Achievement. By Ray Giles. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1938. \$1.75.

Reviewed by MABEL S. ULRICH, M.D.

DR. OSLER used to tell his students that the number of remedies advocated for the cure of a disease was in direct proportion to the profession's ignorance concerning it. In the eyes of the medical man sleeplessness is a symptom rather than a disease, but the aphorism still holds. The hundreds of sleep-wooling panaceas and tricks that have come down to us through the ages attest far more to wishful thinking than to scientific knowledge. Today the barbitals have supplanted sheep-counting in popular favor. Dr. Jacobson quotes from *Fortune* the astounding statement that "in 1932 enough phenobarbital alone was sold to provide most of the population of the United States with a night's rest."

The story of sleep is a fascinating one, partly because after years of research it still remains a mystery story. Both of these books tell it in a lively fashion that makes easy and entertaining reading. Both tell of the physicists, chemists, and doctors who have worked with see-saws, chemical salts, electric nodes, etc., with human and other guinea-pigs, and of the succession of theories they propounded—theories that further researches have tossed into the limbo dreaded by all scientific investigators. Yet the mystery of sleep is still unsolved.

Nevertheless progress has been made. Not so very long ago it was pretty generally agreed that the purpose of sleep was to permit the soul to leave the body and go on expeditions of its own. Today

the evidence seems to point to a "sleep center" hidden in the nervous system. True, nobody as yet has identified such a center, but several workers think they know where it is.

Dr. Jacobson has spent pretty nearly all his time for the past thirty years on the sleep problem. He was still at Harvard when he became convinced that there was the closest connection between muscle tension and sleeplessness. He is now director of a Chicago laboratory, of which he gives an interesting account in the latter part of his book. Four years ago his "You Must Relax" was seized upon with fervor by a tense country. His interest in the relation of relaxation to the recuperative powers of the body has led to the development of electrical recording apparatus so delicate that it can detect the faintest "residual tension" in muscles apparently fully relaxed. It is to this "residual tension" that Jacobson ascribes much insomnia, and he seems to understand just how you can be trained to eliminate it. He presents his thesis through conversations between a "normal" but "nervous" automobile salesman and a wise but folksy doctor, both of whom become very real as the book progresses. The author makes no extravagant claims, and repeatedly warns that time and persistence are essential for a cure. So if you are not "that kind of a person" you will have more fun with Ray Giles's "Sleep!"

Mr. Giles has had much experience writing for magazines, and he knows all the tricks for presenting his "message" in the breeziest possible form. He knows also the lure of names. And so, sprinkled liberally among his "scientific facts" and good horse-sense are "101 Tips from Famous People." These include persons as divergent as Rube Goldberg and Jascha Heifetz, Lillian Gish and Dorothy Thompson. Apparently no one was too busy or important to forego sharing his sleeping tricks with his tossing compatriots. It is all very gay and racy, and the line-drawings contributed by the author are in complete harmony with the text.

Fiddler in Italy

THE WAVELESS PLAIN, An Italian Autobiography. By Walter Starkie. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

IN these recollections of his Calabrian and Sicilian meanderings, readers of Dr. Starkie's earlier books will recognize the scholar gypsy who fiddled his way through Spain and Hungary and Roumania. He is a lively and learned traveling companion, whose interest in the more picturesque specimens of contemporary humanity is matched by his interest in things past and his knowledge of them. He is equally at home in a beggars' den and in the civilization that he conjures up while contemplating the Greek temples of Girgenti. The vagabond fiddler is also a Fellow of Trinity, Dublin. As a Calabrian guide he is less avid of curious bookish lore than is Norman Douglas, and he is less given to philosophizing. A visit to Croton evokes no acid dissertation on Pythagoras, Plato, and Christianity; and a climb to Rossano results in no chapter on Byzantism. But Dr. Starkie has his own stock of out-of-the-way learning, he can philosophize on occasion, and "The Waveless Plain" is, after all, essentially autobiography.

It is the record of the author's experiences in Italy, and his thoughts about Italy, during the past twenty years; and it is only natural that a large portion of the volume should be devoted to the Italy of Il Duce, for the March on Rome is now sixteen years behind us. In Dr. Starkie's eyes, Mussolini is the regenerator and savior of his country, a national leader who has effected a spiritual as well as a material renaissance. Synthesis of Caesar and Napoleon, he is the realization of the Nietzschean dream. He is "a phenomenon of nature. He has been cast up and out of the soil of Italy as a reminder of the eternal primitive virtues of the Italic race which perpetuate themselves from age to age, as flowers and plants do in the Spring."

Let no victim of what Dr. Starkie calls ceaseless and misleading propaganda hastily conclude that this scholar-fiddler has formed his judgments of Il Duce at long range and therefore been himself misled. On the contrary. Since the inception of Fascism he has been married into an Italian family that has flourished and served under the new regime. Not only has he stood, on many occasions, within sound of Mussolini's public voice, but he has sat with him at the little table in the big room in the Palazzo Chigi and noted that his countenance, seen closely, is "lively and winning." More than that, he has accompanied Il Duce's happy singing troops to the Abyssinian war, and at the front itself has observed the heroism with which the devoted Black-shirts faced their terrible foes. "The courage of the Abyssinian fighters," he testifies, "was remarkable; they rushed *en masse* upon the machine guns."

So it is plain that whatever one may think of Dr. Starkie's conclusions regarding the New Italy and its leader, one cannot accuse him of having arrived at them lightly.

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