

This death is one of the minor weaknesses of a strong book. Alice, the mistress, has been drawn, as indeed has the rich girl, Susan, with a lack of sentimentality uncommon in English fiction. The peculiar savagery of female love is beautifully represented in her, and the peculiar resilience of the rejected woman. Such a person would never have been content with getting killed. She would have got her teeth into another Joe.

As the hero rises in the world, English society unfolds before him, avenues of isolated little customs and narrow lanes of distinctions losing him by their resemblance to other customs and other distinctions. From mill-workers to mill-owners, from office boys to city treasurers, Joe observes them all with an objective sensitivity that is in no way lessened by his anxiety to get the better of them and his utter ruthlessness in doing so. His only blind spot is for the people at the very top. His RAF hero is a shade too self-assertive, too unsure of himself. Such a man, in real life, would probably have been very grateful to Joe for running off with the woman

he had been destined to marry. But such slight errors, which are always kept within bounds by the fact that Joe is so presented that one never knows how objective his impressions are supposed to be, such errors do not interfere with the panoramic accuracy of the picture of English society which Mr. Braine has given us. It is not a pleasant picture, but neither is it as ghoul-like as Mr. Stacton's Ludwig nor as demoralising as Mr. Durrell's Alexandria. It bears an astonishing resemblance to the picture of Communist Russia which has recently been painted by such Soviet novelists as Dudintsev. The same a-moral material acquisitiveness is endemic. And it could be compared, as far as that goes, to the England of Defoe or the Russia of Pushkin. It seems to me that Mr. Braine has shown again that, by precise observation of the society that surrounds him immediately, a man can get through to an understanding of the goodness and evil of human beings, a goodness and an evil that have very little to do with the social conditions observed and in terms of which they are presented.

Burns Singer

AN UNHEROIC PICTURE

IT IS a common belief of today that supreme Allied direction in World War II compared favourably with that of World War I. The unsavoury political intrigue that surrounded Lloyd George, the conscienceless jealousy and squabbling for high command, even when the fruit of office could mean no more than presiding over the most abominable holocaust in history, the selfishness and irresponsibility of 1917 and 1918, were not matched, it is said, in the events of 1939 to 1945. There can be no doubt that this belief has much to be said for it. Sir Winston Churchill brought a magnanimity to the tragedy of the Second World War such as no one in power could bring to its hideous predecessor, and his example had a wholesome influence on others, but it is very much to be doubted whether great events, even when they concern thousands of lives, can really purge men's nature of pettiness. The diaries of Lord Alanbrooke and the memoirs of Dr. Dalton do not always suggest a continuously selfless approach to catastrophe. Perhaps when Lord Beaverbrook comes to write, as he promises to do, a record of World War II from his own ringside seat, we shall be as depressed as we are by what he has to tell in his remarkable book *Men and Power 1917-1918*.*

* *Men and Power 1917-1918*. By LORD BEAVERBROOK. Hutchinson. 25s.

When press-lords publish they tend to get a good press. Lord Beaverbrook's reviewer in *The Observer* asserted that "the story must be told in terms of high drama and Lord Beaverbrook is the right man to tell it. He showed many years ago in *Politicians and the War* his supreme ability." Lord Beaverbrook himself asks that his book should be judged as record not literature and he must have been more than surprised at being acclaimed in the eminent weekly as a modern Racine. *The Observer's* was not the only literary laurel to be flung. *The Times* associated Lord Beaverbrook's muse with the name of Tacitus. A more modest tribute came from Mr. Edelman who declared the writing to be "as fresh as tomorrow's *Daily Express*" (indirectly a strange comment on the style of the supreme Latin prosaist). Mr. Walter Elliot pronounced the greatest and most august of titles over the book, qualified it is true by the first noun: "gossip of genius," he wrote in *Time & Tide*. The book had only one bad notice, which appeared in *The National and English Review*. It is worth recalling, not out of a desire to wound the author, but for the interesting grounds of objection taken by Mr. Kenneth Rose: "Each generation," he wrote, ". . . the world must blaze like Valhalla, that Lord Beaverbrook may describe how at critical moments he carried messages, answered phones,

drafted letters of resignation, fitted from ante-room to ante-room. . . . Some may feel that the price we have paid for *Men and Power* is a shade high."

This comment is manifestly unfair, but it brings out, as eulogy does not, the most important point about Lord Beaverbrook's subject-matter. The story he has to tell of the struggle for power during 1917 and 1918 is of the most surprising and unbelievable triviality. I do not think that this in any way proves that Lord Beaverbrook has a trivial mind, but it may well prove that he has something of the good reporter's mind. The book is not a great one as the eulogists would have us believe, Gibbon stands where he did, but it is a very interesting book and far more so than if, departing from his modest and self-declared rôle of witness, Lord Beaverbrook had attempted to strike the resounding lyre and take us for a majestic ride down the corridors of time. The moral of his book is an extremely unpalatable one and may recall again Lord Acton's words on the same subject. The corruption of power often finds its expression in uncontrolled peevishness.

One of the delights of the war (I do not underestimate its darker side) was the opportunity, for people like myself who served on a staff, to observe the effect of power on human beings. It was a sombre if instructive experience and the cause of heart-searching: is that how I would behave if instead of being a junior I found myself on the heights with only a little way farther to go towards eminence? The answer is probably yes. When I was unused to the schoolgirl atmosphere of conference over a certain level I confessed qualms to a friend who in the past had attended Ministerial conferences, the real right thing, in a secretarial capacity. He removed my suspicions that I had got into the wrong set. He said it was always like that, and for a long time, he said, he had found himself unable to believe that what was going on at such meetings was really happening, and still found it hard to believe as he looked back. The silly side of the great career is usually kept decently obscure, but memorialists from time to time let this cat out of the bag. Lord Beaverbrook is the latest to do so. The hero of his story is Lloyd George but there is little in this unheroic picture to make one join in salutation.

THE main merit of his bleak but fascinating account is that it is true. None of his facts has been seriously challenged except what he has said about the claim of Trenchard to be considered as the "father of the Royal Air Force." Lord Beaverbrook denies this claim in bold and cruel terms. So far, he says, from being the founder he was a "father who tried to strangle

the infant at birth, though he got credit for the grown man." According to Lord Templewood, who was closely concerned with Trenchard's work at the time, this is a misreading of what happened. Trenchard was not opposed to the birth of the infant but doubted the wisdom of undertaking the enormous reorganisation necessary for its delivery on the eve of the Ludendorff offensive of 1918. Lord Templewood adds that Trenchard's real views were not indicated by his reluctance in 1918 but by his powerful advocacy of the new service in December 1919. This has gone uncontradicted. But the rest of what is said remains generally accepted.

The most appalling revelation in the book is the now famous episode of "The Lost Box." Lloyd George was accused of deceiving the House of Commons and the country about the strength of the British Army in France. The charge was made by the former Director of Military Operations, General Maurice. The Prime Minister defended himself in the most masterly fashion, routed the whole political and military conspiracy against him, recovered the confidence of the country, and at last enjoyed supreme power which he might have held for many years but for his lack of the deeper astuteness. The crucial debate occurred on May 9th, 1918. Lloyd George was able to defend himself against Maurice's damning charges with surety because he believed himself to be in the right. In fact he was in the wrong and General Maurice was in the right. The truth, the real figures supporting Maurice's accusation, were in an official box which Lloyd George's secretaries had omitted to open. The most extraordinary part of the story, to my mind, is that the truth of the matter should have lain hid for so long, for though the secretaries hastened to burn the papers when they found the box after the debate, their action must have been futile. Surely the same document was and still is to be found in War Office archives. It seems that there still remains something to unravel in this grotesque and perturbing story.

The villains are so numerous that it is hard to select a Mephistopheles from among them. Haig is perhaps denounced more thoroughly than others. In the pithy and brilliant potted biographies in the beginning of the book, Lord Beaverbrook says that with the publication of his private papers in 1952, Haig committed suicide after his death. William II at Doorn said the same thing of Bülow's horribly self-revealing memoirs. The gorgeous figure of Lord Curzon of Kedleston suffers a further reduction and the vulgarity of his mind appears in his strong support of the "Hang-the-Kaiser" hysteria, a support he swiftly withdrew when he saw the way things were going. Reverence is

not accorded to the much venerated figure of Asquith, though no new damaging light is thrown. The reader may feel that the author had no great liking for Arthur Balfour but the latter eludes both the onrush of the attack and the deflating pin. As always he sails through the history of his time unruffled, enigmatic, cold, and beautiful. There is a photograph of him pouring out his charm on a general and ranks of men in khaki. "It is just possible," the author remarks in the miniature at the beginning, "It is just possible that he didn't believe in anything or anybody." The man who comes out best is Bonar Law. The press-lords Rothermere and Northcliffe are handled with much sympathy, and Rothermere comes out as a more movingly tragic figure than the insane Northcliffe. The bias of the reporter is towards masterful men who started with few social advantages and made their way, but this does not mean blind admiration of the type. Field Marshal Robertson is treated roughly and the account of Carson is devastating.

UNLESS the reader is prepared to accept Lord Beaverbrook's rhapsodical estimate of the Welsh Wizard there is hardly a gleam of greatness anywhere in the story. There is nothing like Sir Winston Churchill's rousing of the nation in 1940, nothing like the heroic decision of that year to reinforce the Middle East from a lightly armed island threatened by invasion, nothing to compare with the spirit of D-Day. Yet it is easy to make a too harsh judgment on the men of World War I. The continual and sickening intrigues for office are not to be attributed to any special baseness of character in the men involved. They are the natural way of things in the absence of great and dynamic leadership such as Lloyd George was so nearly capable of, and so fatally missed achieving. Lack of leadership in a moment of catastrophe is bad, but assumed greatness is worse. The leaders of 1917 and 1918 did not pretend to be more than they were. They honestly believed themselves to be essential to the nation's survival, and their struggles for power were undertaken in an authentically patriotic spirit. It is hard not to believe that most of them were profoundly mistaken as to their merits. But in an edifying and majestic atmosphere, such as

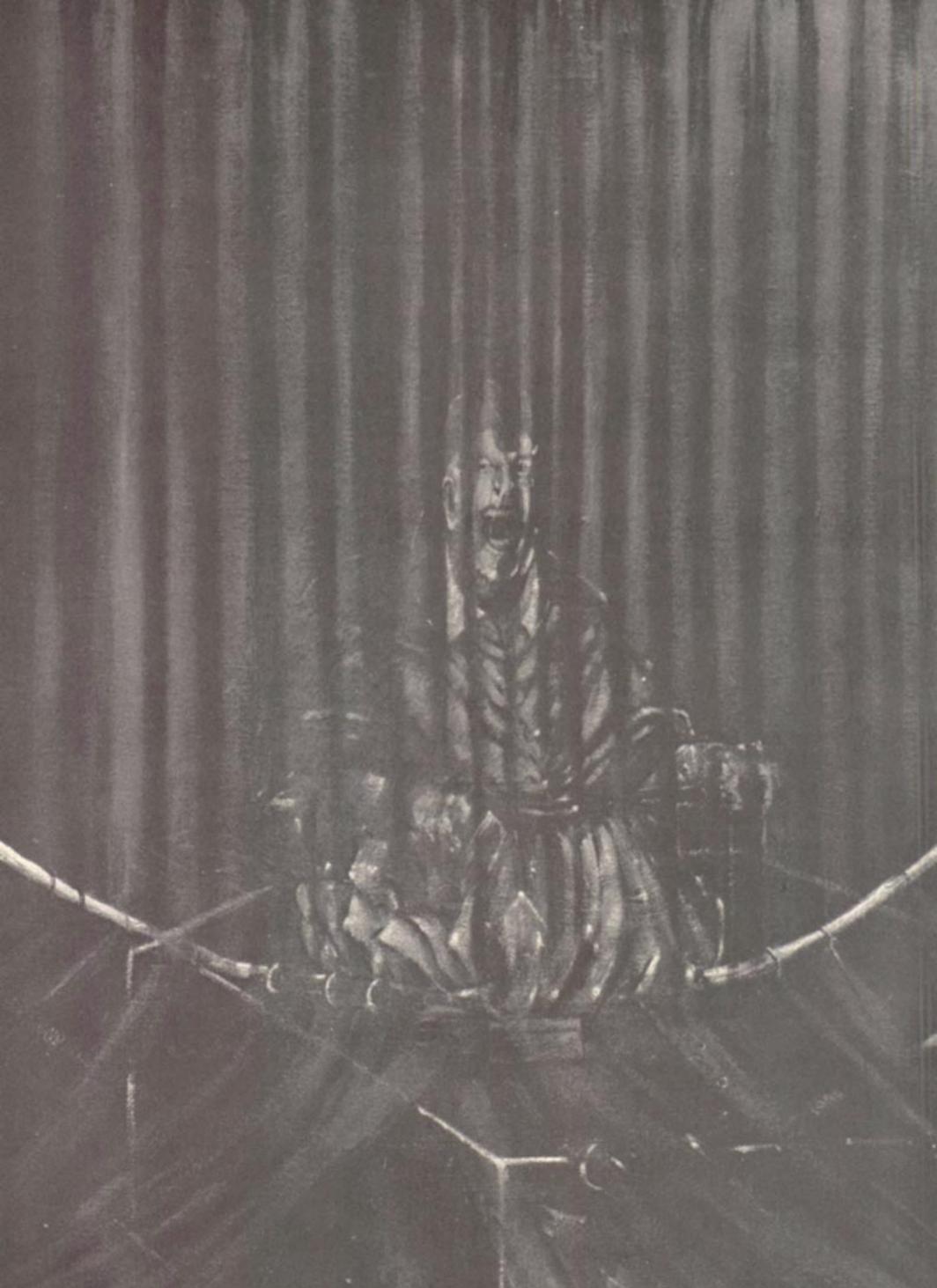
marked some Protectorate councils, and which the innocent junior at the back naturally expects from great conclaves; in such a stirring and solemn setting the leaders might have become very much more mistaken even than they were. Pettiness can drive out hypocrisy.

Little is heard of the frightful background, of the trenches, and the hundreds of thousands of deaths in the mud, the million journeys' ends. We are shown nothing in these pages of the "world's worst wound." A few years after it was over, Bernard Shaw made a fitting comment on Lord Beaverbrook's present subject. "Could you make our citizens pay war taxes," the Archbishop of Rheims asks in *St. Joan*, "Or could you make our soldiers sacrifice their lives, if they knew what is really happening instead of what seems to be happening?" "No, by Saint Denis," replies the Lord Chamberlain, "The fat would be in the fire before sundown."

Christopher Sykes



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ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Mr. Marcus Cunliffe, who regularly reviews books on American affairs for ENCOUNTER, describes himself as follows:

"Why am I not an angry young man? Perhaps (born 1922) I am not young enough. In other respects the pattern fits, or ought to: provincial background, elementary and grammar schooling, Oxbridge, even my present teaching job as lecturer at a provincial university (Manchester). Yet I feel more like a contented lackey of the Welfare State, a flattered traveller on gravy trains. Other people's bounty sustained me at Oxford, where I read history. H.M. Government fed, housed, and clothed me (in khaki) for four years, then civilly obliged me to jump the demob queue and return to Oxford. By way of bonus it gave me an interest in soldiers that I still retain. The Commonwealth Fund nurtured me on two long visits to the United States. This time there were two incidental bonuses—an American wife, and a career in teaching and writing about America. The Social Science Research Council wished on me money to prepare a study of American military attitudes: I hope to complete this in the next year while basking in California at the expense of the Ford Foundation. A philanthropic publisher advanced some dollars for a book on George Washington which I have just about finished. A smug, a disgustingly supine record? No doubt: I simply state the facts."

SUDHIN DATTA, now in his middle fifties, is perhaps the leading Bengali poet of his time. He is widely recognised as the literary successor to Rabindranath Tagore, with whom indeed he made a world tour when he was a young man. In his poetry he has played a rôle—and achieved a stature—comparable to T. S. Eliot in English letters.

Mr. Ben Morreale writes of himself:

"I was born in New York City in 1924, and was educated at Brooklyn College and

Columbia University, where I studied history. I left for Europe in 1951 and remained for six years. There I taught history at the American Community School of Paris for three years; at the same time I prepared my doctoral dissertation at the University of Paris—in 1956 the title of *Doctorat d'Université* was conferred upon me with *mention honorable*. It was in Paris that I started writing: a short story, "Hate," appeared in *The Paris Review*, No. 10. At the present time I have been engaged by the International Business Machines to compile a history of the world. It seems they have invented a machine that speaks, which will be exhibited at the Brussels Fair of 1958, and I must find it words with which to speak. However, I am limited to four typewritten lines for each year: apparently in spite of its extreme intelligence, the machine has certain limitations. I am also working on a novel, "Sicilian Ebbtide," which I hope to have finished by the end of this summer. Then I must rush to find a post teaching in any American college, before this infernal machine replaces teachers of history."

R. C. Kennedy has provided us with the following curriculum vitae:

"Born in Budapest, 1926. Educated at Budapest (Pázmány Péter) University. Came to England in 1947. Two years ago he moved to Ireland, where, now, he is on the staff of the Queen's University of Belfast. Up to October 1956 devoted some time to writing a journal, based partly on experiences during childhood and adolescence, trying to prove that he lived in an age characterised by an absence of revolutions in European countries where every cause for revolt was manifest; how, in fact, it came to pass that the personal revolt did not grow into national movements. Subsequently has found time to speculate whether it would not have been better to be right. And if it is worth while to trace the birth of mistaken, pre-conceived notions."

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