

the hundred pages of letting down the hair will seem much the most diverting portion of the book.

I don't wish to give the impression, however, that "Tallulah" reads like the defendant's testimony in that check-raising trial. You will find here also a disjointed but revealing story of childhood which suggests why and how this tiger started burning bright. You will find an unashamed tribute to Will Bankhead, the "Daddy" of the dedication, who appears never to have ceased operating as an important factor in Tallulah's emotional life. You will find a hint of rue and wistfulness flavoring the chapter on the present day-to-day routines of her life.

You will also pick such plums as these from the pie:

The standing, sitting, freestyle acting champion of the hemisphere hates to act, detesting with equal passion the shabby play not worthy of its players, and the long-run success that bores to madness.

Ethel Barrymore once advised the possessor of the most famous feminine given name on earth to change it to Elizabeth or Mary, since no one could possibly pronounce the name she had.

Re Bette Davis in "All About Eve," Miss Bankhead quotes Will Rogers on the Fred Stone rope-twirling impersonation. Quote: "One of us is lousy." Unquote.

Tallulah first came to the Algonquin, where the sky-rocket was launched, because her chaperoning aunt had heard it was the headquarters of Commander Evangeline Booth. (Possibly apocryphal.)

When Tallulah got a job in the theatre at fifty a week, she hired a French maid at twenty-five a week.

With her rent at twenty-three a week, she had nothing left for food. Solved the problem, though. Stole it off people's plates.

It's not true that the lady once climbed a fire-escape to reach the side of a young actor bedroomed above. She is afraid of heights.

"Tallulah," for all its entertainment value, does have some shortcomings as a memoir. In life, as in her acting, she has not the capacity to verbalize or analyze her experience. This is no guided tour of the works. Her writing about her stage career is a pallid recital of parts played and notices received. There is no hint of the source of the fantastic electrical display which is Bankhead's exciting projection on stage. Nor is there any explanation of how the sultry siren of the early successes became the lusty comedienne who has delighted us in recent years. This book is called "Tallulah," not "Inside Tallulah," but even lacking these hoped-for insights, the book stands cubits above what we have had from three or four other first ladies of the theatre.

The Bankhead story is told in a style which has the baroque vitality and ornamented wit distinctive of the writings of Richard Maney, who is cited in an opening acknowledgment "For Conduct Above and Beyond the Call of Duty." Leaving the problem of authorship to the Baconians, it may be said that the marriage of prose and person has been in this case magically successful. It is Tallulah who speaks from these pages, Tallulah flamboyant, intense, comic, sentimental, a woman who presents in her own person one of the most satisfying spectacles of our age.

## A Grand Tarnish

*THE GLITTER AND THE GOLD.* By Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan. New York: Harper & Bros. 336 pp. \$4.

By ELIZABETH WECTER PIKE

TO come upon Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan's memoirs in the taut and earnest year 1952 is as unlikely an experience as an encounter with a passenger pigeon. We have been carefully taught that both breeds were extinct. We have erred. Mrs. Balsan, very lively indeed, here sets down the record of a seventy-five-year life which, at its mildest, was fabulous.

Daughter of the William K. Vanderbilts, she was born into a diamond-studded world whose axis shifted with the seasons—Newport in summer, New York in the fall, the Riviera for Christmas, Paris in the spring. A world of liveried footmen, governesses, yachts, gowns by Worth, broiled ortolans. A sybaritic world inhabited by the New World's new rich.

Consuelo had a mind—at eight she was at ease with French and German—but little spirit; at eighteen she tumbled docilely into the marriage bed with the Duke of Marlborough. In the annals of American society there has never been a more dazzling nor loveless union, arranged as it was by Consuelo's tyrannical mother who set out to bag for her daughter the highest ducal title dollars could buy. Mrs. Balsan, ever delicate, mentions that certain material considerations were involved in the nuptial pact, but refrains from naming the sum. It happened to be a cool two million five hundred thousand dollars in railroad stock, guaranteed by the New York Central. Thus was Consuelo launched.

Her descriptions of the wedding trip, "serious and depressing," are wistfully hilarious. The Duke addressed his table talk to the maitre d'hotel at assorted Grand Hotels, and kept his bride waiting outside the ruins of Pompeii while he and a guide inspected the paintings and statues erected to the worship of Priapus—a visit, as Mrs. Balsan writes, "bound to awaken discord" in a honeymoon pair.

Their destination, however, was Blenheim, the Marlborough family seat. Americans think fondly of Blenheim, the spot where Churchill was born—in a haunted bedchamber—but Consuelo took a wry view of the place. Pope, quoting the Duke of Shrewsbury, called it "a great quarry of stones above ground," surely a disheartening setting for a bride to set up housekeeping. Consuelo's du'



—From "Tallulah."

Tallulah's return to London (1951)—"one of the most satisfying spectacles."



—From "The Glitter and the Gold."

The Duchess of Marlborough—"anesthetize[d]."

were threefold: to operate and underwrite the vastness that is Blenheim (thirty guest rooms, for instance), and to produce heirs. She performed admirably, giving birth to two sons, all the while entertaining a flow of royal visitors who forever sent their hostess autographed photographs, and learning to hold her own with guests as formidable as the German Emperor, whose conversation was "self-centered, which is usual with kings." Her personal life with Marlborough ground on bleakly. She took to knitting during dinners à deux to anesthetize herself, but her life as a ranking peeress of the realm was fascinating. Her pages read like the "Almanach de Gotha" crossbred with Burke's "Peerage."

And as she opened bazaars and cosseted her Duke's tenants, her social conscience grew—so did her spirit. At last the butterfly broke through the chrysalis. She and Marlborough were separated, and she moved on to London, to independent years, useful, philanthropic years in which she battled for "sweated women" and circled in a new layer of life—with politicians, authors, Fabians.

After World War I she migrated to France and, twenty-five years after her first, to a second and joyous marriage with Jacques Balsan, one of the founders of the Escadrille Lafayette and a very civilized man. World War II washed the Balsans back to her native shore, and there, rather abruptly, Mrs. Balsan ends the recalling and recounting.

As a picture of a period, these memoirs miss the mark—they are far too personal for that. They concern themselves with the modes and the manners of a vanished past, and they are gently charming.



—Culver Service.

Edward VII in Darmstadt—"an explosive and violent temper."

## At Home with the King

RECOLLECTIONS OF THREE REIGNS. By Sir Frederick Ponsonby. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 509 pp. \$5.

By R. ELLIS ROBERTS

THIS book should have been called "Recollections of Three Monarchs or Three Courts." Most students of history and social behavior will be at once exasperated and fascinated by Sir Frederick Ponsonby's intense narrowness of view. He was by training and experience a courtier, a personal servant of the reigning monarch of England. He was a man of honor and some intelligence and a scion of one of the most distinguished of the old Whig families. Sir Frederick—who became Lord Sysonby not long before his death—cannot claim the attention as an author which is given to his younger brother Arthur, the anthologist of diaries; and for most lovers of letters the one outstanding member of the Ponsonby family will remain a woman—that Caro who married William Lamb (afterwards Lord Melbourne, Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister), and who for six months compelled Lord Byron to be true to his pose.

Still Sir Frederick should have a prize of some kind. This book tells, in a self-effacing way, the story of his service in the courts of Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, and King George V. Unfortunately, the Georgian part is incomplete, and the author did not live to revise it. The book covers the years from his birth in 1867 to 1935: he became an equerry of the Queen

in 1895 and, except for a brief service with his regiment, in which he distinguished himself, was never long away from his royal masters. This book is a record, increasingly discreet as he approaches our own time, of the life he led as a courtier. It must surely be unique among historical records in that, while there is a good deal about the First World War, about the Army, about King George V's part in it, there is no mention of President Woodrow Wilson, nor of the League of Nations.

In a prefatory note Colin Welch, who arranged the book for publication, says that Sir Frederick's "devotion to the Royal Family was profound and absolutely genuine" and that "in ceremonial matters he was absolutely in his element." It would not be true to say that the author was not critical of certain royal habits, and that he cannot see the absurdity of too rigid an insistence on a strictly correct etiquette. Still, it is surprising how indulgent he can be to various royal traits which must have been unsympathetic to him. He leaves the reader with the impression, for instance, that in their love of jokes the monarchs he served remained adolescent. Edward VII, we learn here, had an explosive and violent temper, and was not ashamed of roundly cursing his partners at the bridge-table. Of Queen Victoria's severity we have heard often; but I wish Sir Frederick had told us whether she was responsible for the brutality which forbade any one sitting, except, of course, at meals and entertainments, at a royal party.

Sir Frederick is a poor gossip, as