

—Illustrations from Culver.

Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox—"most magnanimous terms."

APPOMATTOX: EPIC SURRENDER

By VIRGINIUS DABNEY

JUST ninety years ago, on April 9, 1865, the conflict which Winston Churchill has called "the last war fought between gentlemen" came to its close at Appomattox Courthouse.

Quiet now broods over the green woodlands and rolling tobacco fields surrounding the little Virginia village. The oaks are tasseling in the sunshine and the dogwood buds swelling, much as they did on that Palm Sunday years ago when Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant. On that day the Union general imposed some of the most magnanimous terms that history records, terms whose courage and generosity helped reunite a nation which had been split asunder by a tragic war.

Today Appomattox is becoming a place of pilgrimage to persons from all over the globe. When the original courthouse burned in 1892 a new one was built three miles away on the Norfolk and Western Railroad, and the modern town of Appomattox grew up there. Most of the hamlet that existed when Lee surrendered has been authentically restored by the National Park Service to the appear-

ance it had at the time; the restoration should be complete before the centennial is observed a decade hence.

Here is the rebuilt Wilmer McLean house, in which Grant and Lee met to draft the terms of the surrender. An old tavern, once a stopping place for stagecoaches westward bound, now serves as a museum for relics of the surrender. Nearby are the old village jail and small general store, together with a number of antebellum residences. With the reconstruction of the burned courthouse, which may not be carried through for ten years, Appomattox will be the only restored nineteenth-century village in America.

It was stolid, phlegmatic General Grant, forty-two, the tanner's son, who finally succeeded in bringing the Confederacy to its knees. After he had forced the surrender of Vicksburg and thus cut the Confederacy in two by getting control of the Mississippi River Grant was entrusted by President Lincoln with the task of smashing the Army of Northern Virginia and taking Richmond.

His opponent, General Lee, white-haired and white-bearded at fifty-seven, was the most brilliant military commander of the war, a man in all respects worthy of his great ancestral

heritage. The South idolized this deep-voiced patrician leader; the North feared and respected him.

IN MARCH 1865, outnumbered and worn down by the relentless hammering of Grant's forces, Lee was striving desperately to hold his lines in front of Petersburg. Then came the disastrous Battle of Five Forks, and both Petersburg and Richmond fell. The main surviving Southern army then began a last-ditch effort to escape toward the West. A shattering defeat at Saylor's Creek brought the Confederacy's haggard and starving veterans to the vicinity of Appomattox Courthouse. Many of these hollow-eyed, exhausted soldiers had had no rations for days except such handfuls of corn as they could embezzle from the fodder of their own famished horses and mules.

One ragged and ravenous rebel was reconnoitering a stray chicken when he was surrounded by well-fed Union troops.

"Surrender, we've got you!" they shouted.

"Yes," said the Southerner, "and a hell of a git you got!"

Torrential rains had turned the whole region into a quagmire, and Lee's army was hardly able to maneuver. The alert Federal forces, spearheaded by Sheridan's cavalry, saw their opportunity. In forced marches which called forth the utmost from soldiers and mounts they completed the encirclement of Lee's army and ended the last hope of the Confederates to make a getaway and join General Joseph E. Johnston's forces in North Carolina.

Lee saw the hopelessness of his position.

"There is nothing left for me to do but go and see General Grant," he said, "and I would rather die a thousand deaths."

He sent word to Grant, and asked his own military secretary, Colonel Charles Marshall, to choose a suitable place for a conference concerning terms of surrender.

While awaiting word from Grant, Lee rested under an apple tree across
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The McLean house—"men wept openly."

Six Pictures of this Era



“A Train of Powder,” by Rebecca West (Viking Press. 310 pp. \$3.75), is a volume of essays about the Nuremberg trials, the Berlin blockade, a South Carolina lynching, British espionage and murder cases. Our reviewer, Telford Taylor, is a member of the New York bar and author of “Grand Inquest”; he was U.S. chief of counsel at the Nuremberg trials.

By Telford Taylor

IF WORDS can paint, Rebecca West's do. A few years ago a motion picture was made of Picasso in which the old magician, armed with palette and brush, stood behind large sheets of glass. A few sweeps of the arm and flicks of the wrist turned vision into image. Human features, bulls' heads, floral patterns, and a miraculous profusion of other concepts and portrayals appeared on the glass in rapid, kaleidoscopic succession. And so it is as one follows Miss West from page to page of the six coruscant essays in her new book, “A Train of Powder.”

Postwar Germany is the theme of three; the Nuremberg trials furnish the *point de depart* for two of these, and the Berlin blockade for the third. The judicial process still fascinates Miss West, as it did in her earlier “The Meaning of Treason” (1947). A mass trial of lynching suspects in South Carolina, and two English trials—one for murder and one for espionage—furnish the narrative framework of the other three works. Neither in Germany nor in the halls of justice does the “train of powder” lead to an explosion between these covers, but in both settings the atmosphere is heavily charged, and it

is plain that a terrible blast would come as no surprise to Miss West.

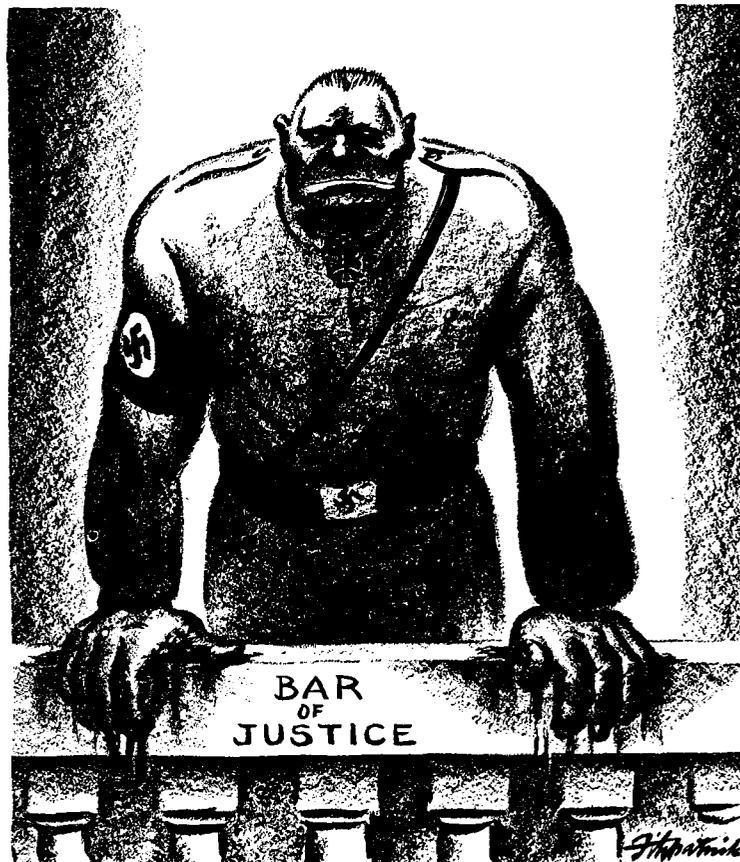
Who but she would entitle a modern Teutonic trilogy “Greenhouse with Cyclamens,” and then derive from this verdant and soothing symbol the most ominous implications? Strolling behind a victor-occupied Schloss near Nuremberg in 1946 Miss West discovered a large, beautifully kept, and well-stocked greenhouse operated by a one-legged veteran of the Russian front and a twelve-year-old girl. Undaunted by devastation, frigid winter, and acute fuel shortage, they were running the greenhouse furnace on wooden scraps laboriously accumulated at great hazard, and doing a brisk business in potted plants amid the rubble of Nuremberg, still stinking with unburied dead. The Nuremberg trials, then in process, were of profound interest to the maimed gardener—the judges and prosecutors broadened the market for his cyclamens.

A praiseworthy example of sturdy German industriousness? But, then:

. . . there was something different and peculiarly German and dynamic in his [the gardener's] self-dedication. . . . He did not want to escape from his greenhouse, he wanted to escape into it. . . . He was terrified because his absorption in industry left a vacuum in his mind which sooner or later would be filled. If no religion or philosophy or art came to bind the man's imagination to reality then the empty space would be flooded with fantasy which would set him at odds with life. Above the greenhouse the Schloss had soared like a huge doll's house, designed to house all the characters out of Grimm's Tales; and some of those tales are very brutal. When men do not put away childish things in time they turn on their tracks and seek the sources of death, such as the Nazis unsealed for them.

In short, the Germans “had not thought enough about government and life,” and thus were singularly susceptible to evil government. This is the *unpolitische* quality of German society forcefully remarked by Norbert Muhlen, which offers “the ground on which the totalitarian minority can grow and strive and rule.”

IS THERE hope of checking that growth? Yes, and Miss West finds it not so much in the Nuremberg trials —“the moralistic experiment of our times which . . . most ambitiously attempted to prevent the spilling of milk in the future”—as in the lessons of the Berlin occupation, blockade, and airlift: “The Berliners were given two experiences of totalitarianism, which demonstrated that it was its principle which was wrong, and that no matter who applied it the result would be pain. . . .” One might fear less the future of Western Ger-



“Last Chapter of ‘Mein Kampf.’”