

and armoured spinsters"; the lady with "as many breasts as Diana of the Ephesians"; the cosmopolitan lady who wishes to find "a little *ventre-à-terre* in London"—all are etched in vitriol. And that souging of the tempest afar, presaging, from the steel-grey ocean, the end; how the author revels in it! With what relief could he write of this seaside town as he writes in his fine passage (page 122) about Pompeii—"Closed for the Winter." He makes one feel that this carnivorous, drunken, fox-hunting portion of this crowd, hypocritical, secretly obscene, is like the people of Sodom. His considered judgment is icy, terrible. We must remember, when we shiver under this savage irony, that the author and others like him are recently come from Calvary, and that the vinegar they proffer there is surely this vision of life as a bleak irony, a cruel and obscene jest...

Of criticism there is little. The redundancy on page 300, from page 13, seems unnecessary, and the quotation from Moore is incorrect. It should be "her young hero," not "her dear hero." The book is packed with wit, humour and subtlety, and, though liking some of the author's poetry extremely, I had not realised his reserves of intensity until I read his prose.

MARY WEBB.  
(MRS. H. B. L. WEBB.)

### SOLDIERS AND STATESMEN.\*

Sir William Robertson's two volumes may be regarded as a collection of sermons, erudite, dogmatic and profound, preached on three texts, as follows: "I do not think that the British Constitution as at present worked is a good fighting machine." "We will never get an agreement of this kind with Ministers. They have too many axes to grind." And "We had a theory of the war which seemed crude and comfortable. Our idea was that British statesmen had done everything conceivable to lose the war for the past two or three years, and that if ever they relaxed their efforts we would surely win." The first of these sayings was made by the then Prime Minister (the late Marquis of Salisbury just after Black Week in 1899; it is quoted very early in "Soldiers and Statesmen" and, it may be added, is a text which has been thoroughly expounded by Sir Frederick Maurice recently in his "Governments and War." The second text is an extract—and a typical one—from a letter from Sir William Robertson to Sir Douglas Haig at the time of the *Nivelle affaire*. The third is from a source not strictly canonical, but at any rate a good working apocrypha; it appears in a work published last month by a New Zealand officer. The sentiment was certainly shared by the bulk of Overseas officers and by very many of their British comrades as well.

With what loss of power the machine of State was working is clear from a survey of conditions at the end of 1914. The Secretary of State for War was aiming at decisive results on the Western Front. The First Lord of the Admiralty was advocating the seizure of the Dardanelles and Constantinople. The Secretary of State for India and the Indian Government were conducting a campaign in Mesopotamia. The Secretary of State for the Colonies was concerned with operations in various parts of Africa. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was pressing upon his various colleagues the strategical advantages to be gained by transferring the main military efforts from the Western Front to the Balkan Peninsula and Syria. Well might Sir William Robertson declare that "a more deplorable state of affairs can surely never have existed in the conduct of any war."

This appalling state of things made a profound impression upon Sir William Robertson, although at the moment he was not in a position directly affected by it. The change came, however, when he was Chief of the General Staff and Mr. Lloyd George was Prime Minister,

\* "Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914-1918." By Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Bart., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., D.S.O. (Cassells.)

and the memories of the futile loss of power caused by the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign still remained. The inception, progress and termination of the Gallipoli gamble are dealt with at length in the first volume, and although we may regret the space devoted to reopening a controversy long settled by the report of the Dardanelles Commission, the subject is of interest as revealing the origin of that intense suspicion and dislike with which Sir William viewed projects put forward by statesmen—as they are called in the title, degenerating however sometimes to mere "politicians" in the text—and as showing the *causa causans* of that intensely anti-Eastern bias of the Chief of the General Staff.

This was the rift which disturbed the harmony which should have existed between the head of the State and the head of the army. Sir William Robertson was a fanatical Westerner; Mr. Lloyd George was a confirmed Easterner. The latter was ever seeking a "way round"; looking for outlying props which might be knocked away from under the enemy; and inclined, it must be added, to flirting with the dangerous heresy that war can be made on the cheap. On the other hand Sir William Robertson accepted as an article of his military religion that the Western was the decisive front. The main body of the enemy was there to be found and, instead of searching for unstable and subsidiary props, Sir William was determined to undermine and destroy the main pillar by which the enemy superstructure was supported. Casualties terrible in number would necessarily ensue, but the price would have to be paid without flinching. Such in a few words were the summarised philosophies of the two leading men in England from 1916 till the last crisis of the war. Where two men, each of strong personality, a combative disposition and holding diametrically opposite views, are fated to have to work in concert, it is clear that one or the other must give way. Sir William Robertson found that he could not conscientiously continue to hold his high office unless the Prime Minister would conform to his views, and, as this solution was rejected, the Chief of the Staff resigned.

The reluctance of Mr. Lloyd George and the statesmen generally to see eye to eye with Sir William was due to the fact that for nearly four years millions of men had been poured into France, and a decisive result seemed as far off as ever. With the introduction of the tank however, in 1916, the possibility of a break through on the Western Front had sensibly increased, and the arguments of the Westerners could now be pitched in a more assertive key. The almost complete lack of appreciation of this new arm which is apparent in Sir William Robertson's volumes is a confession that this new factor was overlooked. This is the most curious feature of a book which has many curious things.

F. E. WHITTON  
(Lieut.-Colonel).

### THE BLACK DEATH.\*

To the student of English history, the phrase "the Black Death" suggests that visitation of the fourteenth century which decimated the population and had such far-reaching economic effects that their influence is hardly exhausted. That no such limited interpretation of the words is adopted by Mr. Nohl is clear from every chapter of his book, and from the fact that he includes among celebrated victims personages so far apart as the Emperor Lothar and Cornelius Jansen, who died in 1138 and 1638 respectively. The volume indeed is not a survey of any particular plague, but of many plagues. Even so its value as a scientific record is somewhat lessened by its avoidance of the economic reactions of plagues, and by its acceptance of Defoe's narrative of the London epidemic of 1665 as a serious contribution to history.

Within its limitations, the compilation brings together much curious information, the effect of which is heightened

\* "The Black Death." Compiled by Johannes Nohl from contemporary sources. Translated by C. H. Clarke. 12s. 6d. (Allen & Unwin.)



*From a drawing by Frank E. Slater*

JOHN BUCHAN.