

none of his eloquence, none of his sense of *direction*. I know that Bratby's quality of paint has come in for a good deal of praise. But I for my part consider it an enthusiastic mess.

THESE painters and their followers by no means confine themselves to still life. They all do portraits, nudes, landscapes, which have the same virtues and defects. It remains to mention a related painter of their generation, Bernard Buffet, who is something of a case apart, with followers of his own (of whom Minaux, in fact, was one in his early work). He is a case apart because, while he uses an iconography similar to theirs, he is not a *coloriste* but a *dessinateur*; one, moreover, with a highly schematic and rigid language of forms. He reduces colour to a grey monochrome; paints very thinly, using the wrong end of the brush to scrawl calligraphic convolutions over the painted surface in order to give it texture; outlines a highly simplified and rather geometric contour of the object and leaves it lying perfectly flat on the picture-plane; elongates forms until they are grotesquely slender.

The inevitable result is an effect of austere melancholy. It sails, of course, very close indeed to the wind of absurdity, often gets blown away by it (though in the figure-paintings rather than the still lifes), but is saved by the extraordinary tension between his shapes which Buffet manages to establish on the picture-surface—a tension which convinces us that the picture is the outcome of a particular experience, not just the rehearsal of his style. This is painting, which, while it may be thought too wilfully idiosyncratic, is free of pretentiousness, because it makes no attempt to disguise either its romanticism or its rootedness in "formalism." It is mood-painting (the mood, of course, being *angst*) and at the same time decoration, in its luxuriantly austere, joyfully joyless way. I believe it to be more subtle and imaginative and distinguished than any other work produced by the kitchen-sink school. As to the fame which has been gained by the others, it is as well to remember that the graveyard of artistic reputations is littered with the ruins of expressionistic painters whose youthful outpourings once took the world by storm.

David Sylvester

R. S. Thomas

A Welsh Ballad Singer

Thomas Edwards— Twm o'r Nant
 If you prefer it—that's my name,
 Truth's constant flame purging my heart
 Of malice and of mean cant.
 Out of the night and the night's cold
 I come knocking at your door ;
 But not begging, my wares are verse
 Too costly for you to set
 Your purse against. Yet if you've bread
 And cheese and beer and fresh cake,
 I'll match them with as good a song
 As you've an ear for. But take heed ;
 Muck of the roads is on my boots,
 Dirt of the world clings to my tongue,
 The mind's pool is quickly stirred
 To bitterness. If you would keep
 Bad thoughts from fouling the song's course,
 Open your eyes' blue windows wide
 And let me sample your smile's worth.

BOOKS

Sir Winston's Predecessor

A RECENT book of memoirs by a contemporary of Lloyd George refers to him as a person whose lowly origins and circumstances rendered him unsuited for admission to the highest councils of the state, an opinion which can be applied with yet greater force to the case of Napoleon Bonaparte. It is perhaps only in England that such ideas can be expressed without meeting anger or ridicule in a prohibitive measure. The belief that the gentleman uses power with more conscience than the self-made man persists widely and vigorously in spite of much heated opposition. English class-feeling is strengthened by a deep moral feeling that is missing from this kind of reaction elsewhere. As a result it can play a profound part in shaping British destinies.

The climax of Lloyd George's life, and of Mr. Frank Owen's admirable record,* is to be found in the events of the year 1917, and the month that went before when Lloyd George rose to the premiership and immediately entered on his struggle with the military hierarchy. The resemblance to 1940 is remarkable but very misleading. For one thing, Neville Chamberlain was more public-spirited and accommodating in his fall than was Asquith, and whereas Sir Winston Churchill had in the course of seven years made himself by 1940 into a personification of the purpose of the war

against Nazism, Lloyd George in 1917 was still remembered as an unpatriotic anti-war agitator, and a foul-mouthed demagogue who had made enemies on the Left and Right. His chief claim to be allowed unprecedented power was that two and a half years of war had proved him to be the greatest administrator of his time.

It is easy to see now that, if he had waited, he might have become Prime Minister in response to an irresistible demand, as happened to Sir Winston; and then he would have enjoyed real power. As it was he had to make so many concessions to his varied following that his power was often illusory, and always so in regard to military appointments. Haig was looked on as a sacred object and it was thoroughly understood that if Lloyd George tried to remove him he would face a revolt in the House of Commons which would be generally supported in the country. Mr. Owen says: "The most popular Press in Britain was backing the belief that the politicians were self-seeking rascals, whereas the generals and admirals were men like gods." Lord Beaverbrook has given the most interesting first-hand evidence for this worship of the service hierarchies in his book *Politicians and the War*. It was a state of mind which was shattered by the war literature of the twenties and thirties, by Siegfried Sassoon's poems, and by David Low's creation of his famous bogey-man "Colonel Blimp." But in 1917 it was almost the faith of a nation. The veneration once given

* *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George, His life and Times*. By FRANK OWEN. Hutchinson. 25s.