

What is of unique interest is the revelation of a Japanese view of the atrocity.

To most Westerners the worst thing about the bombing was that Hiroshima was very doubtfully a military target. People on the spot seem to have felt differently: here was a large Command Headquarters, and a troop assembly area, and several of the people whose sayings are recorded here regarded the strategic blow as the most terrible aspect of the disaster. The heroism of the Japanese is beyond compare, and the news of the surrender was received by the maimed wretches in Dr. Hachiya's hospital with violent rage and tears of national mortification. The familiar American argument that without the great bomb the war might have dragged on for many months at enormous expense of human life on both sides, is not the least contradicted by this account. Dr. Hachiya appals us anew,

but he does not make us accuse ourselves anew.

Nevertheless the memories of Hiroshima and Nuremberg cannot sit easily together in any conscience. This fact may in time lead to the confusion which goes with cynicism about the desirability of a victory against the "Tokyo triangle," even though the beginning of World War II will probably remain clear. Whatever their political shortcomings on other occasions, Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax must always deserve gratitude because their conduct in the last days of peace enabled their countrymen and allies to enter the ordeals of war "strongly armed in honesty." It cannot be said that the more powerful and successful statesmen of 1945 incurred a similar debt when they confounded expediency and principle. Victory is the harder test.

Christopher Sykes

PAST AND PRESENT TENSE

COUNTRIES, like people, seem to become more like themselves as they grow older. It is easy in present-day France to feel that the bones are showing through the familiar charm. The small towns on the road to Paris look more slatternly, and after not only Sedan but Dien Bien Phu the Napoleonic pomp of inner Paris is yet more dated. The Champs Elysées with its plate glass and travel offices has become a mere tourists' street. Montmartre is a suburb, Montparnasse is dead. The boulevard scenes, with their drab 19th century façades, the pre-1914 cafés and shops, women with string bags, street stalls and street traffic, have come to have an aged look. True, intellectual life churns on; in the daily press you find literary men all the way up to M. François Mauriac commenting on political affairs: the trouble is that their words have a secondhand ring. Even the endless and scintillating argumentation of M. Sartre in favour of Communism has by now an almost provincial and musty flavour.

Yet how far is it we, the observers, who

have changed, and how far does the change lie in France? It is the merit of Herbert Luthy's provocative book on France* that he constantly returns to this question. Mr. Luthy brings many assets to this task. He is a Swiss scholar living in Paris, a noted historian of 17th century France, a gifted polemical journalist, and plainly head over heels in love with his subject. We are also told by the book-jacket that he is the son of a Protestant missionary, and the fervour with which, in analysing the state of France, he maintains what it ought to be, at times suggests the paternal profession. Although he has called his book "A contemporary study," it is really more a collection of penetrating essays on such subjects as French government, foreign and colonial policy, economics and culture, in which the documentation is produced only to sustain a brilliantly argued thesis; and in the end it shows both the advantages and the deficiencies of this method.

* *The State of France*. By HERBERT LUTHY. Secker and Warburg. 35s.

THE France of Colbert and Richelieu was the first really centralised modern state in Europe, run by a self-perpetuating horde of officials under an absolute monarchy. In Mr. Luthy's analysis, France is still mortally handicapped by the failure of régime after régime to break the grip of this official caste. Not even the Revolution did so. Mr. Luthy makes much of the point, rightly I think, that the noisy Third Estate of 1789 consisted, not of French capitalists clamouring like their counterparts across the Channel for free enterprise, but in fact predominantly of the *gens de robe*, "lawyers, judges, advocates, notaries, members of courts and councils of every kind, who had been formed and grown great in the monstrous apparatus of justice established under the French monarchy."

The *gens de robe* spun their webs in a state which itself remained designed for the benefit of petty proprietors and the defence of innumerable *situations acquises*, and this crushing past produced the notorious French *immobilisme*. In Mr. Luthy's view, this remains as true as ever. You have the Empire run by an administrative hierarchy almost immune to political change, while governments are transient and the "Homeric struggle in the Parliamentary frogpool" arouses mere derision. The historic battles of the Republic, Left against Right and clerical against anticlerical, have all remained in progress, their issues unsolved. Mr. Luthy illustrates with some relish how this paralysis affects the smallest details of French life. For instance, there is the scandal of the Paris vegetable market, Les Halles: vegetables from remote provinces must pass through this chaotic bottleneck to pass out again at inflated prices, but all attempts to change the system have failed. To have a street paved or a waterpipe laid, a French local council needs the endorsement of six levels of the administration ending with the Finance Ministry in Paris: the process can take a year. In keeping, you have a building industry run practically on a guild system of 200,000 firms with an average labour force of three each (including the employer). Hence, exclaims Mr. Luthy, "in a country whose housing shortage shrieks to high heaven, the building industry suffers from chronic unemployment, with the result that the trade unions are part of the conspiracy."

Recent sins also lie heavily on French

colonial policy, of which Mr. Luthy writes scathingly. But he also reminds us that France possessed the oldest and greatest colonial tradition in Europe, and was established in India and on the Mississippi before the British. Even today, faith in the French civilising mission, and the élan contained in the phrase "100 million Frenchmen," are as much of a reality as all the sordidness of French colonial rule. It is interesting to see that, scathing though he is, Mr. Luthy remains on the side of the French mission.

He is particularly sharp in analysing the distorted effect of the past upon the French Left. The Revolution, after all, had its losses as well as gains. It started with the storming of an empty prison and subsequently filled the prisons of the country to bursting. It proclaimed the rights of man and introduced military conscription. It proclaimed the liberation of the peoples and ended with European satellite states ruled and plundered by Paris. Mr. Luthy points out that these contradictions have escaped a French political Left spell-bound by history. The French workers may have had enough concrete economic reasons to turn against the shabby bourgeois Republic. Still, French Communism was also greatly helped by the fact that faith in Jacobin Utopianism had remained so unchanged in many French circles that this same abstract faith could easily be transferred to the Kremlin. The same historicism bemused Left intellectuals of the type of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Citizens of an old conservative country whose civilisation rested on a refined individualism, they yet felt driven to proclaim a Parisian version of the feverish 19th century class struggle. The adventure ended, as might have been expected, in nightmarish confusion.

I HAVE mentioned only a few of Mr. Luthy's historical insights, which are as startling and illuminating as anything I have read on modern France. The aphoristic essay is a form which obviously lends itself to such a play of swift illumination. But it has its drawbacks, too, which become apparent where Mr. Luthy touches factually on recent politics. Here he comes down to earth and once or twice even rather heavily. For example, on North Africa he suggests the fostering of an Arab cultural élite, presumably in sympathy with France; but he does not say

how this is to be done against the intransigent hostility of Moslem nationalists. Again, the whole question of EDC and a French lead to Europe, which he discusses a little portentously (with M. Schuman as hero), has already been so transformed by recent events that the argument is partly irrelevant. And, as he himself admits, the French economic recovery of the last two years has been more rapid than he imagined it could be.

This really leads to a fundamental point. Mr. Luthy is particularly impressive when he shows how Frenchmen of every type have been so dazzled by their ideals that they have become ineffective. Yet, when arguing that to overcome her domestic and foreign crisis France must shake off the past and cease to be against herself, he seems to fall a little into

the same trap. In a way, this demand for a change in outlook could be put to any country in Europe, or even to the United States. But, violent convulsions apart, countries do not change rapidly. Thus, as France grows older, certain faults may become less prominent while others turn out to be irreparable, the North African empire may even be lost, but she will still be France, just as Britain after the loss of her "civilising mission" in India is still Britain. Indeed, the really quite remarkable recent economic progress in France, which has gone together with similar progress everywhere in Western Europe, goes to show that some of the problems Mr. Luthy discusses may not be so specifically French as he suggests. Still, for what is specifically the French concern, read *The State of France*.

T. R. Fyvel

BAD CONSCIENCE

HOMO REUS, Guilty Man, is one of the more conspicuous synonyms of *homo urbanus*, and we suffer under a whole gamut of shames, from the theological one of having had the bad taste to be descended from apple-stealers, down to such minor matters as having kissed that little girl at the dancing-class, or scribbling "Tush!" on a library-book, or picking one's nose in the bath, or not having kissed that other little girl at that other dancing-class, or being unable to read the works of Mr. William Faulkner. This last failing has been peculiarly painful in a month which has seen the publication of two of this author's books, *A Fable** and *Faulkner's County*.†

A Fable is conceived on a grand scale. Ostensibly it is concerned with an event (that never took place) on the Western Front in spring, 1918: a French regiment refuses to go over the top, and the mutiny spreads at once to enemy and ally. The war comes, not to an end, but a stand-still. This is the surface story:

but at the same time the book is largely a re-writing of the events of Passion Week—the mutiny is instigated by a Corporal and his twelve followers, Bible characters appear thinly disguised (as, for example, the sisters Marthe and Marya), the Corporal goes by way of a Gethsemane and Pilate to his own Calvary and eventual resurrection as the Unknown Soldier under the Arc de Triomphe.

This is a theme which in any case only a writer of Mr. Faulkner's stature has the right to tackle. He has not altogether fallen short of the challenge; in conception this is a very good book indeed, perhaps even a great one. What I find infinitely putting-off (and of course I feel guilty about that) is the execution. In the first place the story is told in an innumerable series of flash-backs and flash-forwards and what-have-you, so that, to my mind at least, all time-sense is lacking. This may give a certain universality and stillness, but surely anything that can call itself *A Fable* should begin approximately at the beginning and end approximately at the end?

This is one deterrent to easy reading. Another is that the book presents a very large number and wide variety of characters, and the story deals with them in bewildering

* *A Fable*. By WILLIAM FAULKNER. Chatto and Windus. 15s.

† *Faulkner's County*. By WILLIAM FAULKNER. Chatto and Windus. 15s.