

present, to have withdrawn from anything like an active part in the struggle to maintain quality; but he still has energy, and knowledge, and above all he has generosity. He may yet surprise us.

Times and Lives

Hired to Kill. By JOHN MORRIS. *Rupert Hart-Davis* in association with *The Cresset Press*. 25s.

Sowing. By LEONARD WOOLF. *The Hogarth Press*. 21s.

WE ARE always being told that we live in an age of criticism, but I wonder whether it would not be truer to say that we live in one of autobiography. Critics would disdain to consider this, because if they discuss contemporary works at all, they confine their attentions to poetry, fiction, and the work of other critics.

Yet it is clear that anyone who writes poetry or fiction in this time is at a grave disadvantage. Owing to rapidly changing modern circumstances the conditions that affect the behaviour of a generation in one decade become entirely altered in the next. The novelists who had that grasp of reality when they were a younger generation which enabled them to analyse their contemporaries in the 30s or 40s or 50s may be disqualified, for that very reason, from understanding another decade. The creative in our time must struggle endlessly to keep up with metamorphosing reality. Poets are perhaps luckier than novelists in that they deal with a more restricted scene, but, on the other hand, even more than the novelists, their reputations are at the mercy of their very limited public, and the changing fashions of intellectual criticism.

If life is short and art is long, autobiography is the only modern art in which the writer has time on his side. For the autobiographer, being dated, having one's roots in the past, being outside, are positive advantages. Read the poems of some Georgian (or writer of the 'Thirties, or Apocalyptic, or Angry Young Man) and one may think—unless the poet is one of the great self-renewers—how he recedes into his time! But read his autobiography, and if it is an exact account, one is more likely to reflect—how wonderful to have been alive then! Yeats modernised his poetic style, and his early poems seem dated. But read his later autobiographic journals

and they seem less fresh and direct than the reminiscences he wrote in the 1890s.

Amazing, one thinks, to have been John Morris, peacefully, as it were, skirmishing side by side with friendly Gurkhas against ferocious tribesmen of the North-West frontier; still more amazing to have lain awake in London like Leonard Woolf, when a boy, listening to the hooves of horses beating their tattoo on the drum of London streets.

These two autobiographers could scarcely be more different. John Morris is a skilful and controlled writer, and despite one major calculated indiscretion (when he admits to being happily seduced by his Gurkha batman in a tent), he constructs a self-portrait which is as cool as that of Gibbon.

His character is phlegmatic to a degree which reminds me at moments of Nietzsche's description of Wagner's music, as having the slowest pulse in the universe. He seems very sensibly to have arranged his life on the principle of choosing jobs for which he was not quite suited, with a view to leaving himself the greatest possible freedom to pursue his real interests, music and literature. In this preliminary volume which, of course, does not take him to anywhere near the time when he became director of the B.B.C.'s "Third Programme," he writes with modesty, and often very funnily, of a military career with many setbacks: but one has the impression that he has always acquitted himself with distinction. After a financial catastrophe had overtaken his middle-class family, Mr. Morris, instead of being sent to the University, was obliged to become a bank clerk. To him, this threatened spiritual death—from which he was saved by the outbreak of the First World War. After taking part in the battle of the Somme, he volunteered for service in India, and at the end of the war found himself in Egypt. He then joined the Indian Army as an officer. While in India he took part in the 1922 Everest expedition, and became an expert on Tibet. The present volume of his autobiography finishes with his being invalided and sent to Switzerland with tuberculosis. But Asia had got into his bones, and he tells us he has never really wanted to live anywhere else.

Mr. Morris writes honestly and unemotionally, but his controlled, detached style can become moving and even terrifying. Chapter Fifteen, in which he describes how he and his company were ambushed by Mahsud tribesmen on the frontier, is a little masterpiece. In a quiet way, Mr. Morris is one of the living masters of English prose style.

LEONARD WOOLF'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY is far more discursive than Mr. Morris's. By comparison, it

seems seeped with passion and enthusiasm. Mr. Woolf had a London Victorian childhood and was one of a family of ten children, the son of Sidney Woolf, Q.C., of Jewish origins. To-day, an octogenarian, looking from his Sussex window, he never forgets "my Semitic ancestors, with the days of their national greatness, such as it was, already behind them... in Persia or Palestine."

This first volume (we are promised more) is about growing up. Mr. Woolf has powers of attentive memory of particulars and an inspired naïveté and love of truth which at moments make his descriptions of childhood, and some of his observations, remind one of Tolstoy's account of his Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth. Indeed there is something Tolstoyan about Mr. Woolf's view that everyone is, or was, in childhood, the same creature, behind the mask of acquired characteristics which he assumes at a certain age in order to confront his fellow-adults, or adolescents.

The fact is that at the age of ten, I was a fully developed human being, mean, cowardly, untruthful, nasty, and cruel, just as I was at twenty, fifty, and seventy. And when I observed my companions' actions or caught a glimpse of the curtain of their words, I recognised in them the

same intimations of immorality. Yet at the same time there was in all of us—or nearly all of us—I am sure, that animula, vagula, blandula, the gentle, eager, inquisitive, generous, vulnerable guest and companion of our bodies which seemed to have little or no connection with that other tough guest and comrade of the same body.

This is a passage one could write on one's heart. It is also revealing of Leonard Woolf's true and human simplicity, and explains why, when he was a magistrate in Ceylon, he could not condemn a prisoner to the lightest punishment without an increase of that trembling of his hands which is hereditary to him, so that he had to withdraw for some minutes before he had enough control to sign the warrant.

Mr. Woolf does not believe in original sin yet he understands the subjective truth of each person's loneliness, inferiority, and animal nature. He is religious without having a religion, in modern terms a liberal, but with a past like a halo surrounding him with shining qualities of Hebrew and Greek civilisations.

His penetration rarely fails, yet his descriptions of his Cambridge friends, those Apostles who afterwards became the demi-gods of Bloomsbury, fall just short of being finally convincing.

He leaves us, of course, in no doubt that G. E. Moore, Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, Desmond McCarthy, were a dazzling band. Nor do I wish to think otherwise. But since they have been labelled "Bloomsbury," it is a pity that it seems to be their fate to be discussed either by those who remain endlessly dazzled by their qualities, or who dismiss them abruptly (at the moment of writing, a current gibe at the "'civilisation' of Clive Bell and Bloomsbury" drops from the pen of F. R. Leavis in a letter to *The New Statesman*).

WHAT ONE REALLY WANTS is a portrait of this generation in three dimensions and not as a kind of credit-and-debit account in the manner of Keynes' *A Memoir*.

Unfortunately, Mr. Woolf applies, for example to Keynes himself, the credit-and-debit approach: first of all telling us how wonderful Keynes was, and then, how awful. The two sides of the account add up to judgment, but not to a human being.

Now the most serious criticism to be made of a group like the "Apostles" is that they wore too inhibitingly the masks of their intellectual attainments, high ideals, physical beauty, personal charm. All these are admirable qualities, but when they have the effect of making the spectator fail to see what goes on behind the mask, of deceiving perhaps even the mask-

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wearers themselves, then you get an inhibiting spirit of cliquish superiority, in which humble and universal values of life, especially the religious, are denied. Compared with a group superiority complex, an individual's inferiority complex is of immortal value.

Every clique—even if its gospel is G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*—has an element of gangsterdom about it: and every mask—even when worn by a Fellow of Kings—is something of the black face-cover worn by a burglar. And the reaction of everyone who dislikes the clique is to tear away the mask and expose behind it—nothing. The only effective defence of Bloomsbury would be to portray its members in three dimensions.

A demon explodes into the Cambridge Symposium and tears off the mask to discover—black beetles. It is D. H. Lawrence writing to David Garnett after a breakfast party given in Bertrand Russell's rooms in Cambridge:

Never bring Birrell to see me any more. There is something nasty about him like black beetles. He is horrible and unclean. I feel I should go mad when I think of your set, Duncan Grant and Keynes and Birrell. It makes me dream of beetles. In Cambridge I had a similar dream. I had felt it slightly before in the Stracheys. But it came upon me full in Keynes and Duncan Grant.

Lawrence's recommendation for dealing with beetles was Keating's powder. He wrote to Bertrand Russell and told him that he was, literally, a baby, and recommended that he should take the course (unprecedented, I think, in the annals of infancy) of committing suicide.

The reactions of the Cambridge set to this kind of thing were, as far as Lawrence is concerned, extremely posthumous. Nearly fifty years later, Bertrand Russell replied on the B.B.C. with a blistering denunciation of Lawrence's philosophy, which he connected with the blood baths of Hitlerism. Keynes in his *Memoir*—forty years later—approaches Lawrence in the statesmanlike, reasonable spirit of Neville Chamberlain considering the attitudes of Hitler.

Keynes felt "There was something in Lawrence's judgment, some justification for his horror and rage against 'us'... there was a 'thinness and superficiality, as well as the falsity, of our view of man's heart.'"

It seems to me that Lawrence's was a cowardly and mean attack, justified only in the light of Lawrence's own psychology, and not relevant to the people attacked, and that there is something suspect about Keynes' leaning over backwards to admit it is one half (the black, or black beetle, half) of the Apostolic truth. He puts me in mind of someone who, being charged

with seeming to be too good to be true, might reply that he is too bad to be false.

Mr. Woolf does believe that behind each one's mask there is the same human being. But this view of life works much better in the first half of his book when he is dealing with his childhood, than in the second half, when he is dazzled by the ideal: and his admissions of the flaws in the golden bowl don't quite bring the Apostles to life. But beyond all else there is the portrait of Leonard Woolf himself, intensely personal, intensely human, not idealized, and for that reason, difficult not to love.

Stephen Spender

Island and Continent

British Policy with Regard to the Unification Efforts on the European Continent. By H. J. HEISER. A. W. Sijthoff (Leiden). Studies on Politics, European Aspects, a Collection of Studies Relating to European Integration published under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

IN THE austere language of a civil servant's memorandum, this useful book records the steps thus far taken in the formation of "Europe," and the external traces of Britain's ambivalent relation to that process. The documents themselves, for all their stiffness, are coloured by the most complex of all the connections which link and divide the peoples of the world, that between Britain and France, in the first instance, and, beyond it, that of Britain to the other nations of the Continent.

The Anglo-French relation is a palimpsest of memories, perpetuating sensitivities and fears which keep the experience of many centuries alive. Saxon and Norman, Napoleon and Foch, Huguenots and Stuarts, lawyers and writers and merchants without number—they are all there, shaping the lenses through which Britons and Frenchmen see the realities of their national interests.

In 1945, there was a widespread feeling on the Continent that "European nationalism" had destroyed itself in the near-suicide of the two German wars. "Europe must be re-born," many believed, and as a single entity, drawing its spiritual meaning from the shared ideals of a common culture, civilised, humane, parliamentary, and democratic. A French officer told me, "I have fought seven wars for France. I am through. From now on, I fight only for