

impact of flint, brilliance, sudden disruptive discharge—they're all still there, "visibly alight in ashes"; the flaws in the gem are there too. But it's the "luminous effect" that one remembers.

## Oxford Without Tears

Oxford. By JAMES MORRIS. *Faber*, 42s.

JAMES MORRIS' *Oxford* is good at all those matters that have nothing to do with mind: gossip anecdotes; portraits of Oxford "characters"; vignettes from the city and the university; water-colours. The only thing that is taxing about it is its sweet determination never to tax anybody. On every page there is some little pointless fact of the kind that children's comics trail along the top of their pages. "Old Dr. Routh had a dog named Romulus which had been brought up by a cat, and washed its face with its paws." "Movable stage-scenery was used for the first time in England during a performance at Christ Church in 1583." And so, with equable remorselessness, on. Nothing is ever done with any such fact or picture except to alchemise it into candy-floss. There are good photographs, and there are neat quips at which an Oxonian is expected to writhe with a pleasurable flush: "Oh, you have us there, sir." "Ever since the Scientific Renaissance in the 17th century," says an announcement in the Museum of the History of Science, 'Oxford has been renowned for its Dodos.'"

It covers a great deal of ground, or skims and scours it. The vocabulary is specious, uncaring, and repetitive; "fructify" and "testy" and "endearing" are called on to do more work than lazy words can manage, even when they are helped by a sterner modernity: "edgy" and "confrontations." (An American professor has recently suggested that we might look upon "confrontation" as a euphemism for copulation—almost the only way of making its pompous ubiquity tolerable.) Mr. Morris, who does not embarrass himself easily, goes in four times for that hoariest of false-beards: "I like to think."

Looped over the high iron railings outside you may still see an old rosary, whose provenance nobody seems to know, but which I like to think was placed there by an Irish student nurse, or perhaps a nun, in gratitude for mercies granted by His Lordship to her hot-blooded lover.

For "I like to think," read "I have managed to drub myself into concocting." All very readable

and skilful, though the professionalism does not extend to impeccable accuracy and does tend to proffer the twice-told tale. On one page, the sycamore in the High Street is "one of the most important trees in Europe," on another it is "one of the most important trees in the world." Occasionally the bright-eyed speed is not quite apt, as when Oxfam is introduced as "the newest and raciest of Oxford's spiritual brotherhoods." The fatigued tastelessness suggests a misguided modernising cleric.

It is sure to be a best-seller, and precisely because it so slavishly fulfils the expectations—and nothing more. Hardly for a moment does it transcend the limitations of this predictable genre, the whimsical chattering travel-book. Donnish, one would once have said. Edible snails in Wychwood Forest? "Nary a *helix pomatia* slobbers through the greeneries of Oxford herself." The only occasions when Mr. Morris' slobberings through the greeneries really stick in my throat are when he comes up against something serious for once. As in the diminutive anecdote about the prisoner who from his cell could see the orrery high inside Nuffield Tower: "The kind-hearted Warden asked if the convict might not be allowed across the road to see the orrery more closely. Permission was refused, however, for the prisoner had a weakness for instruments of a blunter kind." Mr. Morris thinks that Oxford is "smug."

On two subjects he writes like a man who is thinking and caring. The first is Lord Nuffield, who strops the style into sharpness: "the dullest and the saddest of the Oxford characters," "this infelicitous millionaire—who died without an heir, without a religion and with few friends." The other is the First World War and its importance to Oxford. Apart from these, Mr. Morris never rises much above affectionately "testy" garrulity about this "piebald prodigy." Oxford's wish to be thought of as sweetly, maddeningly, eccentric is altogether pandered to. It could have done with some of the asperity of Angus Wilson's *Crazy Crowd*. The praise of dappled things and pied beauty turns out to have as its climax, not "Praise him," but "Praise us."

The portrait of the city is a great deal better, simply because it doesn't lend itself to charades and footling. But whenever a subject has to be mentioned on which people might feel strongly, might have principles, might actually be offended—then Mr. Morris hides away in bluff neutrality. Until 1950 Oxford graduates used to have the right to elect two M.P.s, but "the graduate vote was abolished by the Labour Government of 1945, which thought it smacked of privilege." They didn't think it, they knew it, and the only question is whether or not Oxford graduates ought to have such a privi-

## From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow

The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era  
1904-1919

*Volume II: The War Years: to the Eve of Jutland*

ARTHUR J. MARDER

'... one of the most perfect works ever published on naval strategy at its highest level.'

THE OBSERVER *Volume I* 42s net;

*Volume II, 8 maps, 9 half-tone plates* 60s net

## The Bradlaugh Case

A Study in Late Victorian Opinion and Politics

WALTER N. ARNSTEIN

'.... a model of precise history. It is beautifully written and unfailingly accurate.'

NEW STATESMAN *6 half-tone plates* 50s net

## Simone Weil:

### Seventy Letters

Some hitherto untranslated texts from published and unpublished sources

*Translated and arranged by*

RICHARD REES

These letters throw new light on Simone Weil's life, personality and thought, and include reflections on art, philosophy, mathematics and religion. *4 half-tone plates, 1 text figure* 30s net

## The Poems of Robert Herrick

*Edited by* L. C. MARTIN

This new edition contains the whole of Herrick's own collection, *Hesperides* and *His Noble Numbers*, together with a few other poems which can reasonably be attributed to him.

*Half-tone frontispiece* 30s net

(Oxford Standard Authors)

OXFORD ENGLISH NOVELS

## Colonel Jack

DANIEL DEFOE

*Edited with an Introduction by*

SAMUEL HOLT MONK 25s net

## Mordaunt

JOHN MOORE

*Edited with an Introduction by* W. L. RENWICK  
35s net

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

## The War against Japan

Volume IV: Reconquest of Burma

by Major-General S. Woodburn Kirby, CB, CMG, CIE, OBE, MC, with Brigadier M. R. Roberts, DSO, Colonel G. T. Wards, CMG, OBE, and Air Vice-Marshal N. L. Desoer, CBE.

This is primarily the story of the 14th Army and its commander, Lieut.-General Sir William Slim. It covers the period from the expulsion of the Japanese from the Imphal Plain in August, 1944, to the capture of Rangoon in the first week of May, 1945, and is mainly concerned with the 14th Army's pursuit of the Japanese 15th Army, undertaken in appalling monsoon conditions, to ensure that it was given no time to recuperate. Illustrated.

85s. (88s. 3d.)

## Swaziland

by Dudley Barker

In this new volume in the Corona Library Series, the author has provided an authoritative yet colourful account of the land and its peoples. He describes the traditional life of the Swazi, their beliefs and ambitions, and outlines the growth of political feeling and the occasional clashes as the new impinges on the old

20s. (21s.)

## Magna Carta and its influence in the world today

by Sir Ivor Jennings, KBE, QC, Litt.D, LL.D,

This year sees the 750th anniversary of the Magna Carta and the 700th anniversary of the Parliament of Simon de Montfort. In this book, the author describes the background and the circumstances of the charter and shows how the development of its principles has contributed to the growth of democratic government and the rule of law in many countries all over the world.

3s. 6d. (4s.)

Facsimile of Magna Carta and an accompanying translation are available in an acetate case.

4s. (4s. 7d.)

Also available: a photoposter 'Parliament 1215-1965'

1s. 9d. (2s. 2d.)

## Nepal and the Gurkhas

Designed to give background information about the country of Nepal, as well as about the Gurkhas themselves, their types and characteristics, religions and customs, this book will be of general interest to travellers, all who serve with the Gurkhas in the British Army, mountaineers and members of expeditions. Illustrated.

17s. 6d. (18s. 6d.)

Prices in brackets include postage at inland rates

# HMSO

Government publications can be purchased from the Government Bookshops in London (post orders to P.O. Box 569, S.E.1), Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol, or through any bookseller

lege, not whether it does constitute a privilege to have two votes in a country where everybody else has one. Mr. Morris has no style available that could deal with anything that matters, though he dutifully and ludicrously goes through the motions. "Squalid episodes, every one: and there is squalor still in Oxford, Heaven knows." Heaven may, but the style doesn't.

REVIEWERS are always being reproved for speaking as if their author ought to have produced a different kind of book. But it might have been hoped that Mr. Morris was up to the task of writing an account of Oxford—past and present, city and university—that satisfied the wish for chocolates and the wish for real food. His book would not have had to succumb utterly to cerebral aridity if it had taken genuine notice of those things in Oxford which are important and interesting to think about. He has some characteristically showy and slovenly allusions to other institutions—"quick as a flash to Harvard and the Huntingdon": so quick as a flash as not to leave time for spelling it right. But there is no real comparison with other universities, just as only a few pages are given to the teaching which some people think quite important at Oxford. ("Learning" gets a chapter, but that is mainly from the dons' end because that allows chit-chat about "characters.") Nothing much about what distinguishes Oxford, for good or ill—such as that an undergraduate is not examined on a subject only by the man who has taught it to him. Nothing about the segregation of sexes by colleges. And not more than a passing mention of the huge differences in wealth between the colleges. Mr. Morris is vaguely, and therefore inoffensively, liberal: the proportion of public-school undergraduates is "still much higher than it should be." But since this remark occurs in a context of never thinking about anything, it is a rubber knife. I suppose that the whole confection will be thought to be delightfully in the Oxford manner, which is the last twist of the rubber knife.

*Christopher Ricks*

## That Total Situation

**Under Pressure: the Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the U.S.A.** Edited by A. ALVAREZ. *Pelican*, 3s. 6d.

THIS WAS a radio programme, and now it's a book. But it isn't a book, it's a nightmare New York intellectuals' cocktail party, with everybody playing Henry Adams—doom! doom! doom! The individually recorded tapes

have been edited and the pieces spliced to make the thing sound like a group conversation on the theme, especially obsessive to the visiting Englishman, of America the intellectuals' monster land. Radio hasn't been so frightening since Orson Welles made us believe the Martians were descending on New Jersey.

America is often enough a frightening country, a violent country, and more than either it is an unimaginably self-satisfied country, for here it is the common dream, not the God of the philosophers, that has been made flesh. But literary intellectuals are usually too assertive in conversation to be the most reliable guides to this society. And when the individual voices are edited—as they always are on radio and television, and Mr. Alvarez brings acuteness and sombre emotions to this technique—to make the thing sound like the American *élite's* last word on their monster land, then I can only say, knowing these voices, that the panic is more in Mr. Alvarez than it is in his assembled cast of characters.

Why, given the power of selection and manipulation that is behind any voice on radio and image on television, should I grant more disinterestedness to intellectuals in mass communications than I do to contemporary poets and novelists who believe that all reality is in the mind of the beholder? When an American high-brow serves on a discussion programme and thus surrenders the fine edge of his opinions to the smiling salesmen and other Richard-Nixon-types who mastermind such programmes, he knows that his thoughts on Oedipus and Joe Christmas couldn't mean less to these adjustable faces and professionally sane voices; he will be complimented not for the truth of his observations but because he talked and talked, sometimes recklessly, and so gave the show "pace." Mr. Alvarez is in another class and he is not in the same business, but he combines quick, sensitive, jittery reactions with a critic's love of intellectual pattern and social *Tendenz*—so America comes out all super highways and impersonal jet planes driving us to the usual cheerless awareness of the Lines of Force that imprison The Human Condition in The Age of Totalitarianism.

PUTTING TOGETHER Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Hardwick, Lionel Trilling, Saul Bellow, Murray Kempton, Richard Blackmur, Richard Hofstadter, Norman Podhoretz, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Philip Rahv, etc., is impossible as well as undesirable. But one is struck by the fact that Mr. Alvarez has conceived of their group conversation, that he has in a sense written it by the