

COMMENT

THIS is the time when one is overcome by a desire to speak the truth. Spring reminds us that the English were once a migrant species, taking wing at Easter for Paris, Rome, and Seville or the ten-day mystery cruise. Deprived of such opportunities the desire returns in its negative form, as an angry protest against the office walls and street walls against which we knock our heads till they are bald and polished. Let us say a few honest words before we resume the milling and grinding of our domes towards the correct Austerity glaze.

First about writers and the war. There is a very good job going which brings in about five hundred a year and carries with it, of course, permanent exemption. It is that of being Adviser on Artists. The Artist and the War. The Future of the Artist. The Artist and the New World. The Artist and the Blitz. War and the Artist. Anyone who can manage to get an article printed on any of these subjects will soon find that he is on to a good thing. And yet writing about artists does not make Art, and it is time to realize that every essay, every broadcast, every conversation about the artist and this or that is so much wasted time, and springs out of a sense of guilt and sterility. Are plumbers the unacknowledged legislators of mankind? Should plumbers be political? Should they plumb for plumbing's sake? These questions are neither asked nor answered—but should a poet live in Chelsea or Hampstead? or receive double rations? or accept a part-time job in a Ministry? These problems, to those who know how to answer them in a few thousand words with a blunt yes-and-no, are a wartime gold-mine. The artist in Russia has the largest income, in America the strongest head, in Ireland the bitterest tongue, in France the cheapest food, in Switzerland the sublimest scenery, in Central Europe the best political education. In England he has only the wind and the rain and Reconstruction.

Behind this spate of speculation, and discussion on what services the artist renders and what rewards he should receive, lies a fallacy—the fallacy of the War—Art antithesis, by which warriors are encouraged to become critical of the part played by artists, and artists anxious to assert their importance in face of war. War is only an incident in history, it is not so unlike peace as to require any violent adaptive convulsions from him, in fact it only

changes the artist inasmuch as war enforces totalitarianism, and drives the artist to make the best terms he can with the State. But in continually defending his 'position' the artist is weakening it by ceasing to produce any Art. It is far better to say with Whistler 'Art happens', and then keep silent and hope for the best.

The other pattern is to retreat, while still writing and talking about Art, further and further into those territories where the artist-administrator functions, and this is to get the worst of both worlds, for the artist-administrator in the Civil Service or the B.B.C. is not only prevented from writing by the pressure of work, but his life offers him no material for future creation. These artists will emerge from the war with no artistic achievement and no pent-up artistic energy. They will have talked or minuted their works away, and may even have taken a violent dislike to the literary atmosphere, just when the frustrated writers in Libya or the R.A.F. are panting for culture. To sum up, there are only two places where an artist can possess leisure and irresponsibility today—prison and the sanatorium—Brixton may produce another *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Ulysses* at any moment.

I would therefore declare a moratorium on Art till the war is over. All writers who feel that they are in the war and responsible for winning it should be excused literary activity, and even forbidden it. This alone would remove their guilt, and put an end to the paper-covered books in which they express it.

What would they do instead? Their spare time would be devoted to reading. The war is not conducive to good writing—that can wait till afterwards—but it is a magnificent opportunity for good reading. This many writers have discovered, as can be seen from the constant process of revaluation and stocktaking in our heritage that is going on. But what is wanted is a planned course of reading by which writers are able to profit when the war is over. In planning this reading writers should accept as the first premise that they cannot be too serious, that the worst defect of English writing is its amateurishness, it is a pastime which does not require any basic knowledge of history, psychology, or even of the meaning of words. I would suggest that every writer employed his spare time in this war in coming to terms with science—in other words, in bridging the gulf which has existed between science and Art and which has been so widened by those recent discoveries of science which require a scientific training before

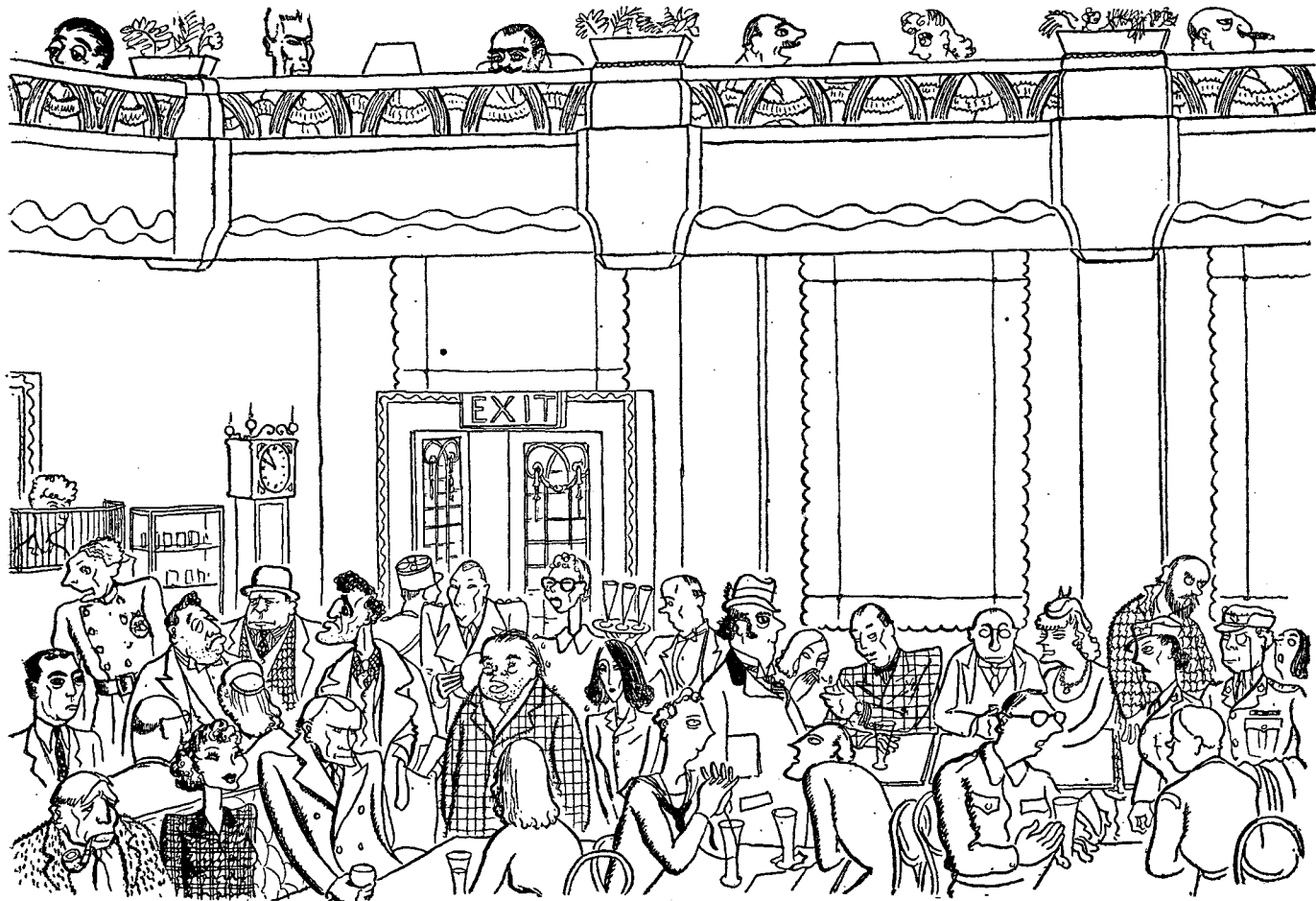
In the last few months several fascinating books have come out, none of which it has yet been possible to review in *Horizon*, and all of which contribute to the knowledge for which we are thirsting. There is Heard's *Training for the Life of the Spirit* (Cassell, 1s. 6d.), the first cheap textbook of the Californian mystics. There is Kenneth Walker's *Diagnosis of Man* (Cape, 12s. 6d.), in which a Harley Street surgeon brilliantly examines the claims of rival systems to be the final authority on life. Starting with the structure of the brain, from the physical end, he leads up through behaviourism, glands, psycho-analysis, and religion towards a position fairly close to Gerald Heard's in which he claims, in the yoga-mystique, the key to our evolution. This is an important book. Another is R. G. Hoskins's *The Glands and their Functions* (Kegan Paul, 18s. 6d.) which is an accurate and modest picture of the present state of glandular knowledge. Rivalling these books in the political field are Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* (Secker and Warburg, 20s.) with the most readable account yet written of Marx and Engels, and Professor Carr's *Conditions of Peace* (Macmillan, 12s. 6d.), which is the most vigorous, intelligent and forward-looking statement of the position of England before and after this war, and shows us the rôle to adopt if we are not to let Europe sink into becoming a Russian Province or an American museum.

It may be said that nothing is more tiresome than an artist with a half-baked knowledge of science—but if all writers read and do no more writing till the war is over, they will have had time to assimilate their knowledge! Labarthe's touching tribute to Sir William Bragg in the current *La France Libre* proves that we have one artist-scientist among us, and we hope that some forthcoming articles in *Horizon* will introduce others. And very helpful to us they should be. For as Montaigne wrote, Art c'est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de savoir jour loalement de son être.

The Irish number of *Horizon* has been banned in Dublin, 'passages in Patrick Kavanagh's poem being considered to be grossly obscene'. *Horizon* would like to take this opportunity to thank our English and American readers for their extreme forbearance in letting this poem pass with favourable comment.

they can be comprehended. The ideal would be a crop of writers who could not say 'I love you' without understanding exactly what is meant by I, love, and you—in the language of biology, psychology, philosophy, and semantics. This divorce between Art and Science, the two great flowerings of the human spirit, is quite artificial, and proceeds from the romantic conception of Art as something which is mysterious and inaccessible, and from the equally superficial prejudice of scientists against the curiosity of the laymen. Yet the first people whose artists and scientists understand each other will enjoy the cultural leadership of the world.

How should a writer tackle science? It is clear that most writers have no time to undergo any scientific training—there are, however, certain books that make the subject easy. One is the *Science of Life*, of which a new edition is just coming out. This is the most fascinating of all compendiums, and contains incidentally, for those who know how to find them, the plots of about fourteen hundred novels. It is very pleasantly written, and when we have finished it the world can never look quite the same to us. It may shock or irritate in parts, it may be wrong, but it is the greatest achievement of Wells and Huxley. Another very good basic book is Gollancz' *Outline of Modern Knowledge*, which is about ten years old, and which consists of a survey of science, philosophy, and psychology, economics, political science, history, etc., by various experts. Much of this is stiff going, but the humanist writer will find that it helps him to those subjects which he can specialize in, and warns him of those which he is quite unfitted to grasp. These books lead on, through their bibliographies, to many others, not forgetting a quantity of scientific Penguins, or such compilations as Kegan Paul's enormous *Bible of the World* (21s.), which includes most of the Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Mohammedan scriptures. I like particularly the first precept of the Yogin Swatmaram Swami: 'The practicer of Hathayoga should live alone in a small hermitage or monastery situated in a place free from rocks, water and fire; of the extent of a bow's length and in a fertile country ruled over by a virtuous king where he will not be disturbed. The hermitage should have a very small door, and should be without any windows. It should be very clean, being daily smeared over with cow dung, and should be free of all insects.'



LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES—IV

OSBERT LANCASTER