

minarets came the muezzin's wailing call to prayer. Down in the narrow, stuffy alley-ways long-robed figures kneeled languidly and kissed the beaten floor. Save for the quick nibbling of the goats and the buzz of flies everything was still and sultry. Up out of this intensity rose the coral spires of the city to cast the last long shadows of day across the desert. And far away in the desert a camel tribe was huddling down for the night in its black mohair tents and singing praises to the new wealthy whites, the givers of gold and bringers of wealth. For these whites had lorries, and wireless, and water-freezers, and were now drawing meat from tins and wine from bottles following a hard day's searching after atomite.

In London they understood none of this. Yet it was London—lacquered skins and shiny seats—that decided.

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Over the dream of Dryadia and the memory of the morning's meeting, the hall of the Whitehall Club—the gloom, the throb and the voices—swam again into focus before his eyes. He looked at his watch and as he did so he heard a voice close by:

'Ah! There you are. Like a wash. I hope I'm not late.'

He rose quickly.

'No, of course not. Fine.'

They moved towards the cloak-room talking eagerly.

OLIVIA MANNING

POETS IN EXILE

A CRITIC in England, reviewing a copy of the Cairo poetry magazine *Personal Landscape*, said of the poets now in the Middle East: 'It is surprising how quickly they have lost touch'. Actually, of course, there is nothing surprising about it and nothing necessarily alarming. After the entry of Italy into the war had closed the Mediterranean, a manuscript took three months to reach England. When it failed to arrive, many more months would pass before the sender could discover that he must post a duplicate. Anxiety and expectation failed during such long waiting and writers ceased to look homewards. Shortage of news

and publications from England, and the realization that years might pass before we saw our friends and families again, produced a sense of isolation and a need for intellectual contacts. Writers began to circulate their work in typed copies. Later, magazines like *Personal Landscape*, the revised *Citadel*, *Orientations* and *Forum* began to appear. It would be a mistake to suppose that these isolated poets and prose-writers have not developed at all because they have not developed in the same way as their contemporaries at home. Whether willingly or not, they have become cosmopolitan; they have met and been influenced by refugee writers of other countries; they have learnt foreign languages not commonly learnt by English people and so absorbed new literatures. The character of poetry written out here may suffer from being outbred as that written in England during the same period may suffer from being inbred. Our own war experiences are typical of most of the civilian writers out here. In Bucharest, where we had been sent by the British Council a few days before the outbreak of war, we went through the sensational year of the Rumanian revolution and collapse, when Jews and, later, Englishmen, disappeared from their homes to reappear, if they did reappear, seriously crippled. We were warned by friends that we were on the Guardists' 'lists', but orders to move on were received from London only after the entry of the German army of occupation. Then we were sent to Athens. Half of the journey had to be done on the German Lufthansa. We arrived a few days before Italy presented her ultimatum to Greece and we left on the last civilian ship after the Germans had broken the Thermopylæ line.

When we first arrived in Athens, without possessions and from an occupied country, we were almost curiosities. But another British Council man, Robert Liddell, the novelist, had had similar experiences. He had gone through the Russian bombing of Helsinki and made an equally uncomfortable escape. Bernard Spencer joined us after the Italians had made one of their few hits—this time on his Salonika hotel.

The British Council has given a number of young men the chance—for which Spender asked in *HORIZON*—to experience events as vividly as war correspondents without the obligation to write to order. In addition to Spencer and Liddell, Dr. H. L. R. Edwards, the Skelton scholar—once described in *Life and Letters*

as one of the hopes of modern Welsh poetry—was lecturing in Athens. He has written very little during the war period, which he feels to be necessarily a period of creative inactivity. Down in Kalamata was another writer, Lawrence Durrell. He was attached to the British Council but had made his own way to Greece years before.

Tied to their jobs, these men could do no more than try to live as normally as the war would let them. Robert Liddell did this most successfully. While German troops were massing on the Græco-Bulgarian frontier, he leased and furnished a house under the Acropolis escarpment and started to translate Politis' *Eroica*.

Bernard Spencer's wife had gone home just before the fall of France and could not get permission to return. This separation, that both knew might last for years, possessed his thoughts and his slowly written poetry. He wrote:

Letters, like blood along a weakening body,
move fainter round our map. On dangerous wings,
on darkness-loving keels they go, so longed for;
but say no memorable things.

The 'dear' and 'darling' and the 'yours for ever'
are relics of a style. But most appear
mere rambling notes: passion and tenderness
fall like a blot or a burst of tears.

Now public truths are scarce as sovereigns,
what measure for the personal truth? How can
this ink and paper coursing continents
utter the clothed or the naked man?

This new, deeply felt emotion gave to his work a force and poignancy it has sometimes lacked before. Just before the German attack, the Council seconded him to the Fuad al Awal University in Cairo where he is still a lecturer. We who were left behind said good-bye to him, knowing there was every chance we would spend the rest of the war in German prison camps.

During the last days, while the Allied wounded were pouring hopelessly into Athens and the *Luftwaffe* was destroying Piræus, escape seemed impossible. When an old steamship was found to evacuate the remaining English civilians, Robert Liddell

abandoned his newly furnished house as philosophically as he had leased it. He, Harold Edwards and Harold's newly married Greek wife, shared with us and three others a two-berth cabin in the depths of a ship that had last been used to transport Italian prisoners. As all the passages had been boarded up to prevent escapes, we did not think it worth while sleeping in life-belts. A number of Greeks, including Seferis and Elie Papadimitriou, came with us. Larry and Nancy Durrell, who had not been warned in time to get to Athens, escaped from the south in an open caïque. Before they made Crete, they spent days among the islands, keeping their infant daughter Ping-Ku alive with tinned milk heated on a primus. When they eventually got to Alexandria, the Egyptian officials kept them in the desert behind barbed wire for some days. Durrell is now working with the M.O.I. in Alexandria.

The first shocking impact of the Middle East numbed everyone. It took months to get over it, and longer to become reconciled to it. Resentment of the squalid shabbiness, the dirt, exposed diseases, beggary, luxury and heat, produced in the refugees an overwhelming nostalgia for Greece that filled their writings and began to bore friends who had not been there. Some of the refugees, who had lost everything, lived for months in extreme poverty. One of those who had to spend the hamsean season in a poor hotel in Cairo was Elie Papadimitriou, a gifted poet and the most important woman in E.A.M. At this time she wrote her long recitative from *Anatolia* and herself put it into vivid, exact English: other poems followed, all haunted by Greek suffering, but not for that reason blind to the scene around her. Here are the last two verses of her poem describing Cairo:

O meidans and sharias of Cairo,
healing
as your river rises and sways
the Feloukas up to rich gardens!
Its infallible mud protects life.
You, also, meidans and sharias
take us in your wisdom which breeds
as many colours and gestures.
Also the merciful law
which defines that low salary
is more humiliating than begging.

Never, O Egypt, I wish you,
in return I pray you may never,
attain the fate of Europe.
Watch these Europeans.
Watch how they go past mute.
How they loiter, well fed, well washed.
The well-paid, flattered soldiers
from the ends of the earth;
youth born, with few words,
whose womenfolk, in misty, noiseless
villages at the end of the earth,
believe that it is a sacrilege to yell
'Where do you take our men?'
Therefore, they multiply,
numbered or numberless,
methodically drunk or clear eyed,
the doomed myriads from many paths,
corpses on the sands and the waves.

Long may you live, monkeys, mice,
dwarfs with plastered faces,
snakes coiled between two black breasts,
acrobats, barrel organs,
that honour life and men.
And we following any one cart procession,
in the glory of so much female fat,
may we cleanse in life-giving dirt
the futility of our destiny.

Gradually writers began to absorb their new environment and to become, to some degree, reconciled to Egypt. They began to admit in their work the curiosities and beauties of a country that, beneath its flattening, white light, offered the naked desert, the crowded, lushly cultivated delta of the peasant, the filth and opulence of the towns—a country that resembled no other in the world. The sense of a greater, past civilization that had left its monuments and mummy-bones everywhere, of the varieties of life superimposed one upon another, and the fact that Cairo, a city putting the tourist first in all things, was the relaxation of men on leave for a few days from the nearness of death in the desert, heightened the senses and put an edge on the nerves.

Exile, nostalgia and uncertainty produced in poets a variety of responses. Tiller, Spencer and Durrell have in the Middle East written poems that stand comparison with the best of their contemporaries at home. These poets, from no choice of their own, are civilians and have the great advantage, denied most Service men, of surroundings in which they can work. If their poetry is outbred, it is not the rootless, neurotic produce of the expatriate, but is outbred only as a result of the assimilation of foreign cultures and new surroundings and experiences. It seems pointless to discuss Tiller's fine poem 'Coptic Church, Musturrud' in terms of his being 'out of touch'.

Nevertheless, the sense of exile colours everything written here. One chilly night in Jerusalem, while the Germans were at El Alamein, half a dozen of us sat in the poor light of a hotel dining-room reading poetry to each other. 'Think of it,' said the Greek Seferis from his dark corner, 'exiles reading poetry to each other'. Many of the poets out here are refugees; all are exiles. Seferis, because he is not only the best of the younger Greek poets but also a man of unusual intellectual power and sympathetic personality, rose to a high position in the Free Greek Government that was recently turned out of office, but he is haunted by the conviction that he should have remained in Greece with his friends. The sense of a missed experience, that no alternative experience can dispel, haunts most of us. Seferis should have suffered in Athens; we should have gone through the London blitz.

Had Seferis written in English, French or German, there is little doubt that he would already be known abroad as an important poet. As it is, he is probably unknown in England except to the subscribers to *Link*, a periodical devoted to modern Greek studies. *Link* published a brilliant piece, written by its editor, N. Bachtin, on Seferis and his fine translation into Greek of 'The Waste Land'. George Seferis is about forty. The literatures of Greece and France were the background of his education, but the strongest influence on his work has been that of T. S. Eliot. As a result of his awareness of himself as a product of mixed cultures, he is preoccupied with the necessity of finding a myth that will express a ruling unity over our unstable civilization. From Pretoria, where he was *en poste* for many months in 1941-42 (and hating it) he wrote to the editors of *Personal Landscape*:

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'We are going backwards to spring between strong winds and extraordinary thunderstorms. There are nights when I wake with the feeling that I am a golden fish in a bottle of electric liquid. It is an atmosphere of sick childhood; stimulating with dryness, stimulating in a bad way. I am trying to write whatever I can from limericks to metaphysical poems. I think that limerick-writing is a good exercise for lonely men and suppose that the genre has been created in England, because all of you are lonely, like islands. But the interesting thing is that it brings forth a sort of individual mythology.'

Indeed, the frightening sense of being alone that Cairo has imposed on all of us, led to a remarkable crop of limericks. These were probably the expression of social—and to a lesser degree, sexual—frustration, and attempts to create and hold together a circle of friends who spoke the same language. Their function in the oppressive, time-wasting, despairing atmosphere of Egypt, was to reassure the writer that his values were not merely personal. Other people could feel as he did. Comparison with Upward and Isherwood's *Mortmere* fantasies immediately come to mind. In a town centred in war that recognized the war only to profit by it, life for British civilians was doubly unnatural. To those of us who had been exhilarated by the Greek fight for freedom, the indifference, waste and dishonesty of the vast, profiteering Levantine population of Cairo was an unending nightmare. Not that Greece had not had its nightmare moments. Evil ruled, but was swept—if unwillingly swept—into war by the unbreakable spirit of the people. Bernard Spencer, in a poem about the air-raids on Salonika, pins down in the third verse the neurotic, secret-police-ridden atmosphere that pervades all countries in the Balkans and Near East:

The fear of speaking was a kind of tic
 Pulling at the eyes. If stranger drank with stranger
 It seemed thief drank with thief. Was it only every
 Night, the fall of the early and lampless dark?
 I remember it so often. And the lie,
 The twist of reason,
 The clever rumour planted in the nerves,
 The dossier infecting like a coccus;
 All these became for us the town, the season.

When we arrived in Cairo, Spencer had settled down in new

café corners and, paler and leaner than ever, was writing infrequent poems that were full of nostalgia for the Greek islands. Tiller (lecturing at Fuad al Awal University) and Durrell are presumably well known in England now, but Spencer has not published at home since *New Verse Anthology*. He has long deserved a wider public. His poems are in the direct tradition of English poetry, and are marked by sincerity, exact observation, and a deep feeling for nature. They are patient, honest, individual, and always come out of the life he is living. Unlike Durrell's work, they never pretend to be more than they are; unlike Tiller's, they never give the impression of straining after something not quite realized. Spencer's tone is unmistakably his own. His values, likes and appetites are recognizable by the average man as normal and universal. (In this he resembles MacNeice, but he has none of MacNeice's dazzle.) He abhors flashiness and is very careful not to let slickness run away with him. Fidelity to his experience is all important to him. He relies on level statement for much of his strength, but on the rare occasion when he is saying something that demands slickness, his command of technique is obvious. Here is part of his recent poem called 'Behaviour of Money':

Money was once well known, like a town hall or the sky
or a river East and West, and you lived one side or the other;
Love and Death dealt shocks,
But for all the money that passed, the wise man knew his brother.

But money changed. Money came jerking roughly alive;
Went battering round the town with a boozy zig-zag tread,
A clear case for arrest,
And the crowds milled and killed for the pound notes that he
shed.

Hearing the drunken roars of Money from down the street
'What's to become of us?' the people in bed would cry:
'And, oh, the thought strikes chill,
What's to become of the world if Money should suddenly die:
Should suddenly take a toss and go down crack on his head:
If the dance suddenly finished, if they stopped the runaway bus,
If the trees stopped racing away?
If our hopes come true and he dies, what's to become of us?'

Among the younger men whom the army has brought out here, Keith Douglas stands alone. He has been in contact with the enemy much of the time and he is the only poet who has written poems comparable with the works of the better poets of the last war and likely to be read as war poems when the war is over. Hamish Henderson, John Waller and G. S. Fraser spent some time in Cairo. Henderson, too, has seen heavy fighting and has written one or two good poems, but his work is less individual and accomplished than that of Douglas. Fraser, at his best, produces pleasant, Georgian verse. In Jerusalem, Stephen Haggard, the actor, was publishing poetry in *Forum* and, when he died, was working on a novel. Archie Lyall, Press attaché in Belgrade until the collapse, has worked in Jerusalem and Cairo. In spite of his impressive list of pre-war publications—including Lyall's *Languages* with its multi-coloured pages—he has written very little in the Middle East. He is one of the few writers out here with established reputations and one of the few whom the war has silenced. Dorian Cooke, founder of 'Seven' and originator of the naïve Apocalyptic theorising, has produced some nerve-ridden, feverishly intense verse. He may develop, but at present his work is over-excited and overladen with adjectives and images. He cracked up while getting his parachute flash, but recovered and is now with Tito. Among civilians, Romilly Fedden (lecturer at Fuad al Awal University) is working on a long poem to be called 'History of the Plains', and John Speirs (also lecturing at the University) has published work in *Scouting*. Speirs' wife, Ruth, has published locally some of the best translations yet made of Rilke.

Palestine, a country that for all its history tends to rouse irritation rather than the imagination today, has given little to the writers whom the war has brought to it. Herbert Howarth, assistant Public Information Officer in Jaffa, has done his most remarkable translations from the Egyptian Arabic. It is probable, however, that the biblical memory that gave rise to one of his finer poems 'Branches of the Family' was prompted by thoughts of Palestine, even though the Ark is said to have set forth from Iraq and come to rest in Sinai. Here are the four middle verses:

Everyone came into the ark
Beginning with the priest who lifted
His beard and vatted navel
And left his chosen water,
The place where a flag of veto blew.

The girls came by ages
The tiny ones with the angry rash
On the bottoms and back thighs
Those with coal-coloured moles like butterflies
Closing round the spine. Then those
With level chests but learning modesty.
Afterwards those with narrow and wrong days
Whether they wore damask or calico.

Even the males were admitted
Although God did not care for
The fur on their shoulder-blades
Nor for their bags, compact
Unwieldly or deficient.
The last word was save the people.

This at the opposite extreme
Of the earth's salt and central basin
Where a millennium since
Two cousins rose together
And cracked their ribs to heave a girder
Up to the human scaffolding.

This is one of the least obscure of Howarth's poems which tend to be involved with the unjustifiable *voulu* obscurity of the Surrealists. He is, however, among the youngest of the men writing out here, and it is probable that his obscurity results from a mentality unusually active and fanciful, and not yet mature.

There is undoubtedly a danger that a writer 'out of touch' is finished if it is life with which he is 'out of touch', but the body of work produced out here during the last three years gives ample proof that writers in the Middle East are in close touch with the life around them. Since it is fairly certain that writing in England, especially during the war, has been suffering from inbreeding, the new work being done here may take home a strain that will prove of real value to the stock.

SELECTED NOTICES

RECENT POETRY

Green Song and Other Poems, by EDITH SITWELL. (Macmillan, 5s.)

A Lost Season, by ROY FULLER. (Hogarth Press, 3s. 6d.)

Chosen Poems, by FREDERIC PROKOSCH. (Chatto and Windus, 6s.)

The Sun My Monument, by LAURIE LEE. (Hogarth Press, 3s. 6d.)

The Burning of the Leaves, by LAURENCE BINYON. (Macmillan, 2s.)

Shadows of Chrysanthemums, by E. J. SCOVELL. (Routledge, 5s.)

I INDULGE myself by reviewing only poems which I like in this number of *HORIZON*. This is partly due to laziness, but it is partly, also, a tribute to these poets. To review them with a dozen or so versifiers would be to suggest that the poets and the versifiers are occupied in doing the same thing, whereas actually, they are doing something quite different. There would be more point in reviewing Miss Edith Sitwell's new poems together with a novel of Virginia Woolf or of Elizabeth Bowen than with poets X—and Y—, who have nothing in common with Miss Sitwell except that they produce books printed in uneven lines.

Miss Sitwell is a striking example of the development which future critics will probably come to think of as characteristic of poets in our age. In her early poems, she was preoccupied in creating her own language and her own world. To some extent the language was wilful and the world was artificial; although she always wrote poems in which there were tenderness and compassion, with lines and whole poems of ravishing beauty. The most significant fact about these early poems is that they were insulated by her own peculiar sensibility from other poems being written at the time and from the whole flood of language and ideas in the outside world. It is in her later poems that the outside world has entered, as an enlargement of the experience which she is capable of creating in her own highly developed language.

There are parallels for the growth of Edith Sitwell's poetry in the poems of T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Rilke and Stefan George. All these poets were preoccupied in their early work, in differentiating their experiences from those of the people around them, emphasizing the special nature of their own sensibility, insulating their language from everyday language. The result was a certain cliquishness