

## SELECTED NOTICES

*Eclipse*. By Alan Moorehead. Hamish Hamilton. 12s. 6d.

'I WAS the last out and I was puffing comfortably along the road when suddenly a voice hailed me across the field.

"Hey you, are you from SHAEF?"

"No, why?"

"Well do you mind not running like that? It makes my men wonder what's happening when they see people running."

'I was much too frightened to be angry. Just the same I wanted to kill that officer. It was a pretty dirty crack at SHAEF at that. However, we caught the edition and got back to our beds in the Lion d'Or in Bayeux. The officer and his platoon stayed out on Livisy ridge.'

Although Mr. Alan Moorehead is a very modest man, as is shown by this little anecdote from his latest book, in the last four years of the war he has probably been consistently nearer to the battlefield than any fighting soldier in the British army. And this nearness has been in time as well as in place. I remember very well in August 1944 being in a village called Trun, just south of Falaise. The days were hot, noisy and dangerous; two nights running my squadron spent in the fearful expectation of being attacked by the remnants of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Division then struggling to extricate itself from the closing gap. Then the noise died down and we got some sleep. Next day I got the *Daily Express* at tea-time—it contained that article of Alan Moorehead's which he reprints on pages 130–132 of *Eclipse*. The village of St. Lambert-sur-Dives which he described as the scene of the incredible carnage in which the 7th German Army was finally overwhelmed was only two miles away. I drove down to see what it looked like. It was the first intimation I had that the battle of the Falaise Gap was over.

Whether by personal inclination or the deliberate policy of the newspaper for which he writes, Moorehead has always addressed himself primarily to the fighting soldier—the man who writes home 'I was there and it was like what the *Express* says'. He has the defects of his qualities. He admits himself that he is not accurate, and his campaign narratives are hard to follow and often unconvincing (incidentally the maps in *Eclipse*, apparently photographs of scale models, are really no help at all). On the other hand his portraits of people are sure and vivid. No other writer of this war has, to my knowledge, done such justice to General Dempsey's elusive but rewarding personality; certainly nothing better has been written about D-Day than Moorehead's description of the feelings of the men taken from their camps all over England and shut up in the wire cages from which, like gladiators before the amphitheatre, they knew they would only be released to take on legendary and terrifying opponents. Of the people of Europe he writes, too, with penetration and sympathy: what is it then that makes him so diffident?

I think the clue comes at the beginning of *Eclipse* where he describes the happiness of a few days spent at Taormina before the invasion of Italy where at his table 'there would often be boys who had come in directly from the fighting, or commandos who were crossing into Italy that night, or others again who had arrived by air from London and New York and Cairo'. An

insensitive man would have felt a measure of self-importance in their company, a timid man might have felt relief in not being exposed to the dangers they were running, Moorehead, a brave and sensitive man, felt shame. Unlike the soldier who, knowing that his turn for dangerous duty will come, sees only advantage in tranquillity, the war reporter, largely his own master, does not think his work ended when he has heard the general's appreciation, but is immediately on his way to see the forward troops go into action. Imbued by this self-sacrificing fire, the Press correspondents have in the British army suffered relatively higher casualties than any other arm; in this spirit they flew in aeroplanes to Berlin and in gliders to Arnhem; in this spirit they died in Burma. Nor have they left a memorial more enduring than brass. At the best they achieved a felicitous and striking description such as the passage I have already referred to on the closing of the Falaise Gap or some of Howard Marshall's broadcasts; at the worst an unconsidered and unconvincing bombast (as for example this description of the epic capture of the Nijmegen bridge—'maddened by this (message) the tanks on the southern bank attacked again, swept through the roundabout, then down the cliff and across the bridge').

In interpreting to the world the feelings of the combatant soldier the Press correspondents did arduous and dangerous work conscientiously and skilfully; they coped with equal success with the demands of circulation managers and security officers, and yet did not lose the sympathy of those of whom they wrote. What they wrote should be judged as journalism and not as literature or history. *Eclipse*, by the best of the British war correspondents, tells the story of the Italian campaign from the capture of Sicily to the fall of Rome and of the fighting in North-Western Europe from the Normandy landings to the final German collapse. Mr. Moorehead, without achieving the glamour of Ernie Pyle, has shown himself to be a first-class reporter and must have gained the lasting respect of many newspaper readers. As a commentator he is sympathetic and urbane, and he has produced in *Eclipse* a survey of the two campaigns which will hardly be bettered until it is superseded by the official histories.

H. D'AVIGDOR-GOLDSMID

*Orion*, Vol. II. Nicholson and Watson. 6s.

*New Road*, 1945. Grey Walls Press. 10s. 6d.

*Focus One*. Denis Dobson Ltd. 8s. 6d.

*Now*, 5. Freedom Press. 2s.

OF these four serious periodicals *Orion* is much the best because the writers are less cagey and more sympathetic. Even in detached biographical studies a reader likes to feel that authors can describe storms or frightened dives for cover because they will admit that they too have suffered. Many of the writers in *New Road*, *Focus One*, and *Now*, give the impression that they are studying the world from a wooden perch.

*Orion* has a warmth in nearly all the contributions, whether it is in an edgy, but fascinating, correspondence between Virginia Woolf and Logan Pearsall Smith, or in analysed 'Notes on Writing a Novel' by Elizabeth Bowen, which, though strict, communicate a passion for a good novel. There are two vivid childhood reminiscences, Margaret Lane writes an absorbing account of two isolated old ladies completely cut off in a valley, and Eric Bligh gives a