

over-stated . . . These defects are the peculiar defects of his particular type of genius. But they should not blind us to his positive qualities. Judged by his best work he is already among the greatest contemporary writers. The completion of his seven-volume autobiography, if it fulfils the promise of what he has already given us, will put his name amongst the three or four great figures of the age. It only remains for me to add that this is a considered opinion.

BRIAN HOWARD

THE DUST

No soap can wash away this sundust
And no scrubbing, this salt dust of the sea.
What is this powder with which you are covered
When the sun lies on your skin, slantingly?

Something like pollen, yet finer, lighter
And more of a mineral thing. It glows
A St. Elmo's fire, a quicksilver wire
Which grows with the sun and with the sun goes.

Is it the true state of being clean? It smells
Like an approaching island, or a shipload of hay.
Made of seadust, sunsalt and flesh, is it the true sign
Of being well and whole? It cannot be washed away.

All I know is, this thing is not a substance
Found on the ill or ugly, or on those
Whose favourite word is 'No'. It is very often
Worn by the beautiful instead of clothes.

All I know is, the desperate have washed you
Using their holy water, for two thousand years
And still the dust I speak of burns upon you
As bright as Love. Brighter than all their tears.

ANON

LETTER FROM AN EX-CONSCRIPT

DURING his first few days in the army, the conscript of today is shown a film entitled *Call-up*, which it is worth while to describe at some length as the example of how the modern National Serviceman is supposed to react and develop during his stretch. The film starts by showing four or five boys receiving their call-up papers, their different classes, characters and reactions being such that each conscript can see part of himself in at least one of them. Then comes their arrival at the camp, their introduction to the sergeant ('... did I hear someone say he was being made a charwoman? Well, you are! so GET ON WITH IT') and to the officer ('I know it all seems a bit strange at first, but you'll soon settle down: and if any of you has any worries, don't hesitate to come and ask me'). There is a flash of their first meal, their first drill parade, quarrels in the barrack-room. Obscene language, in fact, is all that is lacking to make this an exact portrayal of what the audience has undergone during the previous day or two. The film continues to portray the men settling down, learning to do and to like their new job. Their platoon is shown being 'welded into a team' as the army puts it. Like all good propaganda, this film is not a lie, only a perversion of the truth. The average conscript does get accustomed, or at any rate resigned, to his new life; threats of doubling round the square holding a bren gun above his head do induce him to learn something about that weapon's mechanism; in short, he adapts himself. Also, the army's boast that a platoon develops *esprit de corps* is justified, for so does any body of men who live and work together for any length of time. The British Army did not invent comradeship, nor does it provide an especially good environment for it.

Barrack-room thieving, for instance, an old army custom, does not make for mutual trust. It is certainly not mentioned in *Call-up*, but no description of army life is complete without it. It is not confined to those, only an insignificant minority, who stole while civilians. Most soldiers are deficient of some army kit, through