

Byron's Last Journey

Byron: The Last Journey, by Harold Nicolson. New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company. \$4.00.

THIS is one of those books which "it is a positive pleasure to read;" one which even a reviewer is sorry to finish. What more can one say? Why, those who wish to be disagreeable will not fail to say that it shows the influence of the author of Eminent Victorians. Of course it does: Mr. Nicolson and M. Maurois are the two most brilliant members of that new school of biography of which Mr. Strachey is the master. But to whom that is discreditable, or why it should be discreditable to anyone, is more than I can make out.

Mr. Nicolson makes the last year of Byron's life fall very neatly into three parts. First: why did he go? The fifty pages in which that question is raised and answered are perhaps the most lively in this most lively book: also, they are, to me at any rate, convincing. In the spring of '23 Byron was bored as even Byron had never been bored before: he was bored with his whole way of life; he was bored with Italy and the tenth-rate people he met there; he was bored with his own reputation and with being an incessant raree show; he was more than bored with the dreadful Hunts and their filthy brats and the whole tribe of touchy, enthusiastic malcontents which Shelley had left on his hands; worst of all, he was sick to death of his mistress, and, as ill luck would have it, this mistress was a person whom he could not shake off without some decent excuse. Well, there was Greece; and in a dashing chapter Mr. Nicolson sketches enough of the European situation to explain why Greece was there.

One of the things that Mr. Strachey has taught the younger generation is the art of drawing characters without sacrificing documents, or rather the art of building them up out of documents. Mr. Nicolson is his aptest pupil; without being less easy and entertaining than M. Maurois he contrives to be much more scholarly. In this first part of his book he depends a good deal on Lady Blessington—too much perhaps. For her ladyship seems to have been a silly woman with a taste for sentimental high-falutin, who, when Byron "played up," took all that he said for serious self-revelation: beneath the cynical and raffish exterior she was bent on finding a sensitive and gentlemanly soul, and his lordship was very willing to produce one. I am sorry, too, that Mr. Nicolson should have added his pleasant tones to the disparaging clamor against the Guiccioli. What precisely was her offence I have never been able to learn, but suppose it to have been that she was a foreigner and a lady. That she was the former shocked English men of letters; it was the latter, no doubt, that irritated Mrs. Shelley and her crew.

Part two: on board *The Hercules*, Argostoli, Metaxata. No document that I know of obliges us to share the author's slightly melodramatic conception of the voyage as something felt from the first to be "fatal." "He knew that the only positive action of which he was still capable

was death. And was it positive? No wonder that he crouched there, sullen and despairing, in the stern." "Sullen and despairing," or bilious and peevish? Be that as it may; the great surprise to most readers in this part of the book will be Mr. Nicolson's view of Trelawny. Mr. Nicolson does not like Miss Mayne's "great gentleman," and has no difficulty in showing—and shows brilliantly—what a noisy, ignorant, conceited blackguard the man was. But surely there is more to be said about the writer of the *Recollections* and of those letters. Surely one can see in Trelawny, not only the writer, but that which made him write as he did. For Trelawny is one of those—Cobbett is another, and Byron himself, in his letters, a third—whose prose is remarkable just because it takes so decisively the imprint of a remarkable character. A man who had no more in him than Mr. Nicolson allows might have written better than Trelawny, but could never have written as Trelawny wrote.

Missolonghi, in spite of Mr. Nicolson's detached and tolerably cynical tone, which he rarely drops, and when dropped the reader invariably regrets, is frankly terrifying. Never was rat more miserably trapped; never was trap set in a more lugubrious spot; never was man more hopelessly beaten, nonplussed, impotent, cheated, ill-used and alone. And it was Byron. What he suffered from the Souliots we know from his letters; what he suffered from Colonel Stanhope we know from the gentleman's letters to the London Committee ("Lord Byron mentioned his Panopticon as visionary. . . . I said that Bentham had a truly British heart.") He must have been ready to die: but Bruno and Millingen, with their imbecile notions and professional brutality, could not let him do even that in peace.

CLIVE BELL.

The Long Walk

The Shadow of the Cross, by Jean and Jérôme Tharaud. English Translation by Frances Delanoy Little. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

The Long Walk of Samba Diouf, by Jean and Jérôme Tharaud. English Translation by Willis Steell. New York: Duffield and Company. \$1.75.

IT is not the imploring of an ancient people that comes through the first pages of *The Shadow of the Cross*. A book about the Jewish people who are the European ancestors of our Ghetto and Riverside Drive, commences upon a stage that is the earthen floor of their poor synagogue. Its people first speak to us in a dispute over three times 180 florins that have been left in legacy to the community. This is the particular honesty of mind brought to the situation by the Tharauds. The florins are to be used for copying a Thora for the synagogue, a holy book that requires months for its true composition. The men are gathered, talking. While a crazy vanity agitates the hands of some in a mad effort to convey a subtle difference of opinion, the hands of others are

digging into their beards in the hope of finding an idea. A mad activity of life that catches lip and eye, hot and shining, up into the bad air of unwashed bodies—who is the holy person who is to do copying—who then will set out to commission Reb Eljé to do the work—who will go to Poland.

Meanwhile a Jew outside has bought up all the eggs, and is at work on the maize. . . . This is the clay that falls to the deft fingers of the Tharaud brothers, and of it they make a work with the quality that won for them the Prix Goncourt. With care and information and love, on through festivals and forms, they proceed; ever the qualities that mark this first gathering of the people repeat and dilate the idea of the people, these sad, quick, hot people that are insistently present through this story.

It is perhaps that very insistence which makes one leave these people of Israel sooner than one would care to, for the authors intuitively know an ancient race, have set forth the beauty of its forms in living, and have let us behold that which is the prophet in man. The men may trade, and wander; the women grow heavy and dull from their litters; but in the eyes of the children sparkles life, and in the form of the old men stands forth the austerity of the prophet.

One leaves *The Shadow of the Cross* certain of the sensitive and secure feeling that Jean and Jérôme Tharaud obtain in their usual collaboration. It creates a striking temperament, and a happy certainty that in the story of how a Senegalese went to *Our War*, no value of contrast or combination will be unused; for the Tharauds are not outside of that French tradition which comprehends the scale of niceties, if nothing else, and has given and supported a Molière tradition. We are in love with the idea of the Long Walk of Samba Diouf before we start. Nor do the Tharauds fail us. The narrative steps out with feet aware of the jungle.

Samba Diouf is about to set off to the country of the Foulahs, for an inheritance of cattle. Before he goes he brings the candle and the kola nuts of love-making to the door of Yamina. Samba has helped the old man with his clearing for years, with an eye on his daughter's beauty. The wealth of the dead uncle brightens her eyes, and she speaks of the beautiful cotton drawers that are woven in the country of the Foulahs. Certainly, if need be, Samba will sell a heifer to bring these drawers back. And Samba Diouf leaves for the south.

The little ticker the white men speak by is busy. A great war—not against the blacks, but the Alamans. Each village must send its share of men to the Manso, to the commandant. Samba, on his way from the village of the Niomi, is made welcome with palm wine by the mischievous Mandinguese. The tough sea-cow hunter is quickly bound by them and sent to the Manso instead of one of their own number. The long walk thus carries Samba to France, the land of the Toubabs, and the 113th Senegalese.

Finally they are taught enough to understand the simple ideas of one another and of their officers, and they

come near the front, to fight at last; the reason that has put their millet and the village tree under which the Ancients sit so far behind them is achieved. But instead, they make roads. Feet spread wide from patting jungle paths are given immense shoes, which mud clings to. The Oulouf must sleep beside the shepherd from Peuhl. In the day the couche-couche (spear) stands idle in the tent, and rocks are broken. From far away in the jungle come letters; prices are high, and Samba is no longer at home to spear fish, and the old father must buy millet. Nor did Samba bring the expected legacy from the country of the Foulahs. Yamina is taken up with a strange man. All this incomprehensible drudgery the Toubabs call war.

What wonder then, if in the moonlight there are dances, and the tom-tom beats. And wearied of dance, an excited black throws dust in the face of a neighbor, and they all fall to fighting among themselves.

Before these people have destroyed each other, the thrifty French move them to the front trench, that they may go with their yell and their whirling couche-couche against the enemy. The earth shakes, and thunders with splitting. At night the stars burst and the sky is afire. These white Toubabs are truly gods. Then the time comes to go over into that barren waste where the unseen enemy must be. Aoua! Aitia! Samba leaps over, and on. The head of a great blond youth comes off too suddenly and spatters him with blood; with blinded eyes he staggers on. . . . Then a hyena bites his shoulder, and all the trees of his native forest are falling on him. There are crashing trees, the piercing cry of monkeys, the frightful ramp of thousands of hooves, buffaloes, hyenas, panthers who run growling. The hatchets of the pirogue makers ever thudding at the trees. . . .

Samba comes home, out of it all, with a medal and his "little" (left) arm dead. Back to Niomi he comes; he brings his inheritance with him from the Foulah country. But his pirogue is destroyed in a typhoon while crossing the river, and most of the cattle are lost. And he has forgotten the drawers for Yamina. But there is peace and rejoicing in the village and a feast. Never will Samba hunt the crocodile in the river, or hold a paddle in his pirogue; never to spear fish again. But the tom-tom beats. Eh. Diouf! Tom-tom—Io. Diouf!

Something has been added to the paralyzing intensification of war we expected. It is a blending of mind and temperament, striking and beautiful because it is gentle and tender, and in it these Ancients, this Samba Diouf, live their lives, their own lives which are so utterly reasonable.

ALFRED STANFORD.

India in Ferment

India in Ferment, by Claude H. Van Tyne. New York: D. Appleton and Company. \$2.00.

PROFESSOR VAN TYNE has done a positive disservice to the British friend of his in India who promised that every door would be open if he would but go and see the Indian situation for himself. Every door was opened by this anonymous friend but Professor Van