

London:

MAJESTIC

BEATLE

ENCOMIUM

by Terence Prittie

Humbug, hypocrisy, muddle-headedness, resentment and pure facetiousness all played their part in the violent attacks which were launched this summer on the British Prime Minister, the Crown and their various advisors, because M.B.E.'s (Medals of the British Empire) were awarded to the four pop-singer members of the "Beatles" group. These four young men are believed to have amassed a million pounds (\$2,800,000) in the last two and a half years. They have introduced an ostensibly new rhythm, the "Liverpool Beat," to British dance-halls. And they have popularised the over-the-eyes and down-the-back-of-the-neck hairdo affected nowadays by so many young Britons. They are beloved of the younger generation and are the bane of barbers.

The awarding of "Honours" is an old British practice—some would say malpractice—and plenty of Honours have gone where no honour was due. This was not always so. Squires of the Middle Ages were dubbed knights on the field of battle for their generalship of small bodies of men or for their individual gallantry. Baronies were conferred on men who may have been rogues in one of a dozen different ways but who were at least staunch supporters of the Crown and Realm. As for decorations, there were barely half-a-dozen in existence as late as the middle of the last century. Even the Victoria Cross, the hallmark of extreme valour, only celebrated its centenary nine years ago—a remarkable fact when remembering that it was the first decoration for valour, while the British had fought more than a hundred wars since the Norman Conquest of 1066.

Long before that, however, the granting of Honours was becoming an abuse. At the beginning of the 18th century, for instance, Queen Anne created eight peers in a day—in order to ensure that the House of Lords would support the Government in its intention of signing the Peace of Utrecht. At the end of that century one of my own ancestors was ennobled to the rank of Baron Dunalley, for voting for the Act of Union which ended the short golden age of the Irish Parliament in Dublin and resulted in Irish members sitting in Westminster. Whatever my forbear may have thought at the time, the Act of Union, seen in retrospect, appears to have been one of the worst mistakes in British history.

The younger William Pitt had already begun the inflation of the peerage which



has never since ceased. Only once did he encounter strong resistance, when he elevated a Jewish money-lender, Sampson Gideon, to the rank of Baron Eardley. That particular resistance sprang from the wrong reason, social snobbery; Sampson Gideon probably deserved better of his monarch than did many of his fellow-peers. Curiously, there was no subsequent protest of the same strength for more than a hundred years. This occurred when David Lloyd George, Prime Minister in 1921, tried but failed to give a peerage to a South African adventurer. All through the 19th century the number of peerages multiplied at an alarming rate. Awards were very often given quite simply in return for massive financial contributions to party funds, and so many brewers qualified through this method of distributing their profits that the House of Lords began to be known as the "Beerage."

In the buying of titles—for this is what it amounted to—the Conservatives were by no means the main offenders. During the last thirty years of the 19th century some of the most obscure Liberals ever to wear a coronet were made peers. Of one of them it was said that he owed his title to faking furniture—the source of his fortune, from which he made his unusually handsome contribution to party funds. More than one commoner was translated to the House of Lords in order to keep his mouth shut.

The Victorians had an instinct for propriety which their successors in Britain have lacked. When Lloyd George was busiest distributing Honours, London became known as the "City of Dreadful Knights." The hand-out of minor decorations was immensely increased by the invention of a regular Royal "Birthday List of Honours" in the 1890's and by the creation of the Order of the British Empire in 1917. Already, by the latter date, it had become common practice to give decorations and Honours to staff officers who had come no closer than listening distance to the sounds of battle. The nefarious habit had been introduced by simply handing a "quota" of decorations to a commanding officer and leaving him to decide whether rank or merit counted in distributing them.

Decorations for "service" to the State continued to multiply. More than one prostitute has been "honoured," and one might wonder why a brothel keeper has never been "put on the list." For that matter, no book-maker has been either, although the jockey Gordon Richards was

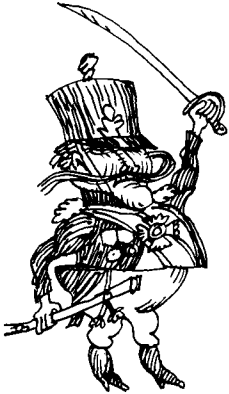
... eight
peers in
a day ...

knighted for riding for gain. Once upon a time no divorced person could obtain entrance to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot Race-course; now one is likelier to gain rather than lose from a life of unimpeachable immorality. It is no longer possible to guess what "service" to the State constitutes. Footballers and cricketers have joined the inspectors of drains and the military men who never saw active service in the Honours List. It would be hard to debase those lists any further.

It was a misguidedly facetious touch which resulted in the M.B.E. being awarded to four "Beatles" who were not even named. Mr. Wilson's Government may have hoped to popularise itself by this absurd gesture; in the process it only damaged its image the more. Not that anybody could hold anything against the "Beatles," who are friendly, uninhibited young men. They personally admitted that they had never heard of the M.B.E. and joked in a somewhat uncertain manner about it on television. Their very lack of understanding or interest made it all the more clear that the Wilson Government made the joint award to a pop-group in order to curry favour with that pop-group's fans, the voters of tomorrow.

The protests of private citizens have been many and violent. They have been often misplaced. Some dissidents have vented their wrath on the unwitting "Beatles." Others tried to "send back" their own decorations. This was a waste of everybody's time. Honours cannot be shed, once accepted. The dispatch of a medal to No. 10 Downing Street or to Buckingham Palace costs merely a limited amount in postage — and under Mr. Wedgwood Benn the postal services are none too efficient anyway. What should really be at stake is not anti-Beatle gestures but a concerted protest against the whole Honours system. It is perfectly possible that the system as such should be totally abolished. If it were, I would be among the first to send back, with decorous thanks, my own M.B.E. — earned for escaping from prisoner-of-war camps in Germany during the war. When I accepted it, I knew too little about the Honours List. What I have learned since suggests that there is greater honour in serving the State, without Honours.

... awarded
to four
"Beatles" ...



Travel:

MARIENBAD
IN CYPRUS
by G. M. Feigen



It came to a head one afternoon last fall when I visited Bill Blair, the Jerusalem correspondent with the New York Times. We were sitting in the octagonal living room of his quiet, white stone Arab house, drinking gazeuse, and the Blairs were inquiring about my itinerary. A vivid yellow streak of hot afternoon sun crossed the marble floor, and looking at this absently, I decided that I was going to Cyprus. From that moment, the excitement became commingled with apprehension, which I managed by asking questions about such ordinary things as hotel accommodations in Nicosia, airline schedules, and the names of people I might find helpful.

I thought that my decision to visit Cyprus was a sudden one, until I realized that it had been simmering for several months. I caught quite a few Cypriot news reports as I was wandering around the Near East, and they sounded like an unstructured play, badly in need of rewriting. When I got to Jerusalem, I was able to fill in the mosaic with more involving information. An American newspaperman had been hit by a stray bullet and might lose the sight of an eye . . . the Turks accused the Greeks of nauseating atrocities . . . the Greek side of Nicosia had all the food and petrol . . . sporadic gunfire raked across the United Nations neutral zone . . . no one seemed able to explain why who was doing what to whom.

The next day I found myself at the Tel Aviv airport boarding the noon El Al plane to Cyprus. The stewardess gave me a dry biscuit, which I munched absently watching the few passengers and wondering why they were going to a "strife-torn" island in the northeast Mediterranean, when ordinary prudence would have kept them safely at home. My own inside animal got sleepy; I dozed off, awaking a half hour later to the sight of a rectangular airport a few hundred feet under the wings.

I expected to find tension, to sense a tightness of people in danger, and personally, to be processed with careful thoroughness. What I did find was confusion, indifference, and a Customs officer who viewed me with suspicion for several minutes, and then stamped my luggage without examining it. I found a taxi and, settling back, hopefully told the Greek driver to take me to the Ledra Palace Hotel. The ride took about fifteen minutes. He told me how Nicosia was divided into two parts by the "karizis," that the airport and the best business places were in the Greek