

drawn or lightly sketched—in the flat, though, not the round—and make their way through a host of generally gruesome and pitiful bit players.

West's favorites are cripples, dwarfs, down-and-outers, sinister Orientals, plausible crooks, and bullies. The action is generally episodic, and capriciously so—it is possible to imagine any of the novels achieving pretty much the same effects with a different set of episodes—and the method seems to be derived from the picaresque novel. *A Cool Million*, whose hero, a guileless young man named Lemuel Pitkin, sets out for the big city to save his mother from a mean mortgager, is reminiscent of *Candide*, as the young man loses his teeth, an eye, his scalp, and eventually his life, only to be canonized as the hero of a fascist movement that stands for everything his own trusting nature has seemed to stand against.

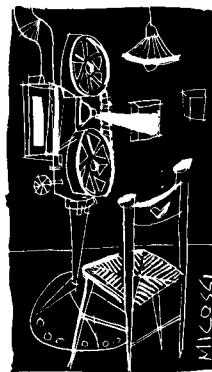
Too Easy a Hatred

In this and the two better-known novels, then, West's message seems to be that everything is empty and dreadful. Friendship is pretty much a fraud. Such sex as there is—and there isn't much, apart from sexual day-dreams and connivings—is, at best, faintly repellent. The landscape is crowded with people, and the people are uniformly unlovely: deformed, dried up, slovenly, sweaty. They jostle you, they shove their faces into yours, and the faces are rank with suffering and hatred. Even the pretty girls are anatomized to a point where they seem disagreeable. The architecture—especially that of Hollywood, which is splendidly portrayed in *The Day of the Locust*—is incongruous, makeshift, and ghastly; it infects the people, as the people infect it.

Escape from this mess, as Miss Lonelyhearts discovers, is impossible. His editor and guide through hell, Shrike, ticks off the possible escapes—religion, the South Seas, back-to-the-soil, etc.—and effortlessly pulverizes each. Tod Hackett, an artist through whose eyes Hollywood is seen in *The Day of the Locust*, reaches the peak of his power in envisioning an apocalyptic mob scene in Hollywood, which he sees as a dream dump; the book ends as his

vision materializes. Nobody gets what he is after, and nobody could imaginably get what he is after. Tod doesn't get the girl. The girl does not get to be a film star. Miss Lonelyhearts doesn't get to imitate Christ—not for long, anyway—and Miss Lonelyhearts' clients don't get comfort.

IT IS A PITY that West did not live to write more. As it stands, his



despair seems, to me at least, only a couple of removes from the theatrical despair of the young aes-

thete—particularly the young aesthete of the 1930's, who had to cope not with the syrupy sanctimony of our day but with the grimmer, if cleaner, realities of a civilization that simply was not performing its most basic functions. What saves these grotesque novels from being merely a youthful yawp of tedium and anguish is that West could see and feel and write. For all his cynicism, his portrait of suffering people in New York and Hollywood is deeply, heartbreakingly sympathetic and, for all his grief, his writing is in places magnificently comic. Emotionally, in his refusal to be comforted, he appeared to be at a dead end. Perhaps he would have remained there; one of his merits certainly was the very absoluteness of his disillusionment—his rejection of all easy appeals to the brighter side, even the slightly brighter side.

But West's talent seemed to be growing, and one may surmise that had he lived he might have gone far beyond the merely grotesque, the merely disgusting, the merely hopeless.

Beaverbrook

On the Great War

SANDER VANOCUR

MEN AND POWER: 1917-1918, by Lord Beaverbrook. Duell, Sloan and Pearce. \$6.50.

Lord Beaverbrook is the last of the great British press lords. Though his newspapers enjoy a great circulation, Lord Beaverbrook's influence in British life is now almost nonexistent. If he has any power at all, it is purely a negative kind that invariably enhances the person or policy he chooses to attack. To be an object of Lord Beaverbrook's wrath these days is almost the surest way to success.

Yet Lord Beaverbrook is one of the best-known and most attractive figures in modern British history. He must be respected even if his views cannot be embraced. And on one aspect of history—Great Brit-

ain during the First World War—what he has to say is important. *Men and Power 1917-1918* is the first of three volumes of memoirs written by a major participant in the affairs of Great Britain during the time when it won a war but began an accelerated decline from its once great position as a world power.

Very few of the men who led Britain then are still alive. Lord Beaverbrook is one. Sir Winston Churchill is another. But these memoirs do not constitute an epic work like Sir Winston's *The World Crisis*, with its magnificent prose tapestries of nations clashing and empires crumbling.

Lord Beaverbrook has written the "inside stuff." His style is the style used by his newspapers, the short

staccato bursts, the explosive phrases that give the readers the sensation of screeching brakes. This is not meant to be derogatory. Lord Beaverbrook is offering in these memoirs the richest possible kind of history.

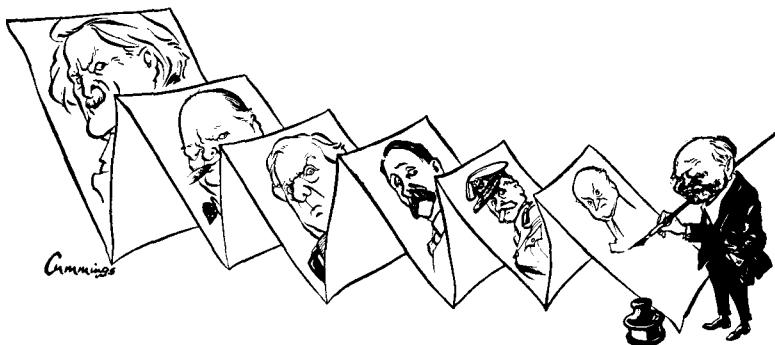
It is personal history, written, Lord Beaverbrook claims, "with complete impartiality and entirely independent of party or personal affiliations." This is not entirely true. Lord Beaverbrook is too much of a partisan to be completely objective about anyone. But his objectivity is considerable, a reflection of that sophistication of British politics which allows private admiration to withstand the shock of political opposition.

The memoirs, prefaced like a drama with a list of major characters and a short sketch of their lives up to 1918, are drawn from the memory of a man who was the confidant of nearly every major figure in Britain at the time—Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Winston Churchill, and Northcliffe, then the greatest press lord in Britain.

Young Man from Canada

William Maxwell Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, had come to Britain from Canada, where he made his first million before he was thirty. His wealth had been made through business mergers. Now he tried the same principle in politics, where he had friends in all parties. In his recently published autobiography, David Low, who drew cartoons with complete editorial freedom for Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard*, claims that two simple ideas were behind His Lordship's every action—"mergers and the exploitation of the new values arising therefrom." After hearing Lord Beaverbrook discoursing for an entire evening on John Knox, H. G. Wells told Low: "If Max ever gets to Heaven, he won't last long. He will be chucked out for trying to pull off a merger between Heaven and Hell . . . after having secured a controlling interest in subsidiary companies in both places, of course."

No man, however, even one with a foot in both the Tory and Liberal camps, could manage to be everywhere at once and consulted on every issue. Much as he hates to admit it, a few decisions were made without Lord Beaverbrook's advice.



Left to right—Lloyd George, Churchill, Asquith, Bonar Law, Haig, Curzon, Beaverbrook

What escaped him has been filled in by use of the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle and his ownership of one of the world's finest collections of private political papers—the Lloyd George papers, the diaries and letters of Lloyd George's wife, and the Bonar Law papers.

The First World War is distant now in our minds and in any event it never meant to us what it did to the British. To them it was one of those epic events in history whose consequences seem to be endlessly unfolding. Most of the British people, including nearly all their leaders, never seemed to have grasped the idea that this war was something entirely different from anything they had experienced before.

Oscar Wilde may have been slanderous when he wrote that the British are never quite so happy as when in the presence of mediocrity. Yet there was something mediocre about the way Britain was being governed by the fall of 1916 under a coalition government headed by the Liberal Party leader, Herbert Henry Asquith, Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, a man described by Beaverbrook as filled with "uninformed indolence, gentle indifference." Lloyd George, though a powerful figure in the cabinet, felt impotent as long as Asquith was Prime Minister. Winston Churchill was out of office, still in political disgrace over Gallipoli.

The Generals and the War

The generals ruled the conduct of the war. Two men, General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief of the B.E.F. in France,

had the unquestioning support of many politicians, King George V, the general public, and most of the press.

In *The World Crisis*, Winston Churchill described the campaign waged by the press (Beaverbrook's papers were an exception) to enhance the role of the military at the expense of the politicians. "The foolish doctrine was preached to the public through innumerable agencies that Generals and Admirals must be right on war matters and civilians of all kinds must be wrong . . . Such was the picture presented to the public and such was the mood which ruled."

When Lloyd George seized power from Asquith at the end of 1916—with Beaverbrook acting his customary role of the man who merges opposing forces—he was determined that military control over the conduct of the war would have to be ended if Britain was to win.

Lloyd George was surely the most dazzling figure in British political life in this century, Churchill not excluded. In gaining control of the coalition and in forcing Asquith to resign, he had split his own Liberal Party. His path to power had been built upon the stones of compromises. His Secretary of State for War, a Conservative, openly sided with the generals against him. At a time when he needed imagination and enterprise in his government, he was bound by a pledge he had given to leading Conservatives—that Winston Churchill would never be given any governmental post that involved the direction of the war effort.

Lloyd George did bring Churchill

into the government, though not immediately. The action, when it came, took considerable political courage on Lloyd George's part, for Churchill was then the most hated man in British public life. When Lloyd George made the decision, he gave Lord Beaverbrook the unpleasant duty of passing on the information to Bonar Law, leader of the Conservative Party.

Public reaction was almost hysterical. The editorial comment of the *Morning Post* was typical. "That dangerous and uncertain quantity, Mr. Winston Churchill—a floating kidney in the body politic—is back again in Westminster . . . The one thing certain is that the Lloyd George Ministry has been dangerously weakened by what has happened."

The government did not fall because of the Churchill appointment, and Lloyd George, even if he did not completely defeat the generals, did at least manage to maneuver them out of effective control of the war effort.

Four years after the war, Lloyd George was out of office. For the next twenty-three years, he walked the British political scene like some powerless ghost, feared by all but trusted by none.

Welsh Wizard's Apprentice

His greatest days were probably those late in the spring of 1918 when the British line had been broken by the Germans, the Russians were out of the war, and the American armies were not yet completely in it. When talk in the cabinet was whether to retreat north to protect the Channel ports or retire south to maintain contact with the French armies, Lloyd George crushed all wavering with his decision to counterattack. To Lord Beaverbrook, "this was his finest moment. It was then his leadership showed supreme, his courage undiminished."

Without realizing it, Lloyd George also performed one other great service for his country. He showed Winston Churchill that a British Prime Minister must have absolute control over the direction of a war. For him to have that control, his own party must be solidly behind him. Churchill had this support during the Second World War. The pupil had learned his lesson well.

Book Notes

MASACCIO: FRESCOES IN FLORENCE. The New York Graphic Society, by arrangement with UNESCO. \$16.50.

There are organizations easier to interpret than UNESCO, whose pursuit of good causes around the world as an arm of the United Nations ranges from combating illiteracy along the Congo to producing some of the most luxurious art books of our day. But no special justification is needed for this book, a superlative album of large-scale color plates of the Florentine master's surviving frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel. It justifies itself almost at any price.

A goal of much of UNESCO's work is to help acquaint people with the cultures of other areas of the globe. With this in mind it has launched a series of high-quality, multilingual monographs presenting arts as varied as ancient Persian miniatures, Hindu paintings from the Ajanta caves, aboriginal Australian design, and the high creations of Spanish Romanesque. The editors have shown a brilliant perspicacity of taste.

When it came to picking a subject that would represent to all the world the particular glory of the Italian Renaissance, the possibilities were obviously legion. A monograph of the familiar, well-loved work of Michaelangelo or Raphael or Botticelli might have served, or on the other hand one on, say, the geometric experimental Uccello, a painter especially prized among the avant-garde today. In taking as their exemplar the daring, original Masaccio, who died at twenty-seven and left only a few works that have survived, they chose a master who in his short life combined both the victorious search for the natural form and a continuing devotion to the symbols of Christian expression. They also chose an artist whose works, cracked and smoked and badly lit in their recesses, are singularly hard to see and appreciate in the original—so that even those who have made their pilgrimage to the Brancacci Chapel will see here for the first time Masaccio's detail in its full glory.

Art lovers all over the West are familiar with the agonizing nakedness of his Adam and Eve—perhaps the first "true nudes" portrayed in

over a millennium—as they stagger out of the Garden of Eden under the crushing weight of their guilt. Not so many, until they pause over these plates, may have felt the whole impact of Masaccio's Christ and St. Peter and St. John, dawn on the chapel walls with a depth and tenderness that make these images live with their inner radiance as among the most searching masterpieces of western art. Their language is so universal that no translation is needed.

MADAME BOVARY, by Gustave Flaubert. A New Translation by Francis Steegmuller. Random House. \$3.95.

It may be argued that the best way to look at a Greek statue would be to see it unmutilated, brightly colored, under Attic skies two thousand years ago. It may be said that to read so great a novel as *Madame Bovary* it would be best to be a Frenchman of Flaubert's time with the memory of the proto-fascist King Louis Philippe still fresh in his mind. These counsels of perfection demand of us a mobility in time and space that can exist only in dreams. The fact is that the Greek statue is in the museum, and Emma is compelled to speak to most of us in English. Let, then, the museum be properly lighted and Emma's anguish sound forth clearly. It is Francis Steegmuller's truly remarkable achievement in this fine translation that she speaks to us almost as movingly as she does to Frenchmen in her native tongue.

THE SANDCASTLE, by Iris Murdoch. Viking Press. \$3.95.

The weirdly fascinating people who hopped, skipped, and jumped through Miss Murdoch's extraordinary first two books have been left outside the gates of *The Sandcastle*. Here an English schoolmaster, middle-aged and married and the father of two children, does nothing more remarkable than fall in love with a young girl. His children and his wife do nothing more remarkable than fight to hold the family together. The only person to do anything out of the way is the author, who has turned this situation into the finest novel to be published so far this year.