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of LITERATURE

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Partners in Blunder

A REVIEW BY GENERAL HUGH S. JOHNSON

PARTNERS IN PLUNDER. By J. B. Matthews and R. E. Shallcross. New York: Covici-Friede. 1935. \$2.50.

THE title page promises: "Another Consumer's Research book that names names and explodes dynamite in high places." The ballyhoo is that the book shows that the methods of American business are indistinguishable from those of American gangsters. The conclusions are:

We are not ending a mere era but an epoch. Those who say we shall recover because we have recovered before, should remember that we have also perished before. Modern civilization is sunk. The lower middle-class, converted into a sadistic mob by the sex motif in modern advertising, is just about to emit one terrifying homosexual squeal and rush out to destroy everything. (You can be sure of this because a Florida lynchmob once mutilated a negro.) First, however, we must go through a phase of fascism which will be started just as soon as Messrs. Sloan, Young, Morgan, and Dupont get around to it.

Democrats, Republicans, labor unions, liberals, and even socialists are helpless because they are too mild and because they are enemies of Soviet Russia. Believe it or not, that is exactly what this book says and that is all it says.

As an argument for overthrowing our government, this takes the cake—let's start a red revolution because we don't like the methods and output of the advertising business.

There are passionate passages about tooth paste, reducing compounds, fruit-sprays, paid testimonials, and high-pressure salesmanship. Only one remedy is suggested and that is: *Down with everything and call in the Soviets.*

When you come to look for the gangster and piratical methods of business, you find that they consist in high-pressure sales-technique, and the facts that the churches do not attack the profit-system, that Douglas MacArthur recommends an efficient army and Claude Swanson a good navy, that some fruit-sprays are poisonous if not washed off, that some patent medicines will kill you if you take the whole box instead of just one pill, that the General Electric Company wants

to see four fans in every home and other manufacturers also sell "gadgets" (air conditioning being the most sinister), that automobiles and other products begin to wear out as soon as you start using them, that corporations do not use inventions as fast as they are made, that some kinds of advertising use a fake scientific appeal, some a sex-appeal, and some a disgust motif in short blunt Anglo (like the sweat, spit, stink, and bad-breath boys), that business is run for profit, that there is some anti-semitism, that many tooth pastes and mouths washes aren't worth the money, that negroes and whites are not on the same basis, and that the country doesn't like communists. That is all there is to justify the title—that is absolutely all. John Dillinger and Baby Face Floyd, or Jacques La Fitte and Captain Kidd, wouldn't have considered it wholly sufficient for their purposes.

Now Consumer's Research is an excellent thing. It sends you scientific analyses of the actual merits of standard advertised brands of consumer's goods, and is the best buyer's guide and debunker of ballyhoo in this country. Almost anybody would approve what this service and this book say about high-pressure selling and hokum advertising. But to suggest a cure of that slight economic acne on the body politic by immediate destruction of our army, navy, government, economic system, and both the Christian and Jewish religions, is like saying of a man with a red spot on his nose: "Burn that brute, he has a pimple." We scrub the grime off our infant offspring but we don't throw the baby out with the dirty water.

Of all the ballyhoo in all the fake advertising I ever saw or heard of, the *schmuss* that this book is a dangerous and powerful contribution to the literature of revolt, caps the pile for impudent mendacity. When I was asked to review it and was told it might be hot stuff, I agreed because I thought I was going to get myself all heated up in a debate on political economy and have a lot of fun. I settled down, fairly tingling, to read it. It was just like Huck Finn's "Royal Nonesuch"—a "sell." If this happened in Russia old Joe Stalin would have his Cheka quietly put these two authors out of the way as counter-revolutionaries of the

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J. B. S. HALDANE. Photographed for The Saturday Review by Robert Disraeli.

Death All Round the Clock

BY J. B. S. HALDANE

THE history of my childhood was written round great men. I learned the campaigns of Alexander, the voyages of St. Paul, the veracity of George Washington. In my middle age I was told that this was a romantic delusion. History was made by economic processes, or perhaps even by the biological rise and fall of races, certainly not by individuals. And now Dr. Zinsser appears as the representative of a new romanticism.* Francis I, Napoleon, and Hindenburg among others, were defeated by his hero, or possibly heroine, *Rickettsia prowaceki*.

For his title, "Rats, Lice and History," is somewhat misleading. He has given us a biography of typhus fever, whose causative organism bears the somewhat unpronounceable name which I have mentioned. It is true that, consciously modelling himself on Tristram Shandy, he does not chronicle the birth of his heroine until the thirteenth of his sixteen chapters. In the rats *Rickettsia* lives a fairly peaceable life, not causing violent pestilences. It is probably transferred from rat to man by fleas. But such cases are sporadic. In the great epidemics it is transferred from man to man by louse. And the great epidemics make history. Hence the title.

Dr. Zinsser has fed so many lice on his own person that he feels positively maternal towards them. He laments the cruelty of fate by which, while man sometimes recovers from typhus, the louse never does so. As an ex-louse restaurant (France 1915) I fully share the author's affection for these engaging little creatures, which did so much to relieve the monotony of trench life. Moreover, whereas on the Eastern front they spread typhus, in the West they must have saved thousands of lives by disseminating trench fever, a disease which, though rarely fatal, effectively took one out of the front line.

Towards rats, Dr. Zinsser is less than just. He chronicles the great series of wars by which the brown rat conquered Europe and North America from the black rat, and compares them with similar inhumanities of man. But the two cases are not really parallel. The black and brown

rats belong to different species, and will not hybridize, as all human races can. When Dr. Zinsser has fought a campaign for the emancipation of caged chimpanzees and gorillas, he can start criticizing rat morality. But not till then.

And so to history. Our author is not only a scientist, but a scholar. The frequency of his footnotes leads one to suspect that he is an admirer of Gibbon, with whom he shares a somewhat pungent appreciation of certain kinds of human misbehavior, as appears in the short biography of *Treponema pallidum* in chapter IV. Since typhus is particularly a disease of armies and prisons, man does not appear at his best in this book.

Being preoccupied with death, Dr. Zinsser cannot help developing philosophy. For philosophy arises from the contemplation of death. You can get through life with the aid of science. You need philosophy, whether or not that of a particular religion, to face the other thing. Dr. Zinsser's philosophy does not form a system. It is highly personal. But it is there. He

This Week

WAS EUROPE A SUCCESS?

By JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

Reviewed by Laurence Stapleton

LEAN MEN

By RALPH BATES

Reviewed by William Harlan Hale

NO QUARTER GIVEN

By PAUL HORGAN

Reviewed by Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant

THE AFRICAN QUEEN

By C. S. FORESTER

Reviewed by Amy Loveman

A YOUNG MAN IN A HURRY

By T. O. BEACHCROFT

Reviewed by William Rose Ben't

UP THE HILL

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

THE TWILIGHT OF PARENTHOOD

By ENID CHARLES

Reviewed by William F. Ogburn

Next Week or Later

THE COPELAND TRANSLATIONS

Reviewed by Leonard Bacon



GENERAL JOHNSON, ON JANUARY 26, TELLING HOUSE MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE THAT AMERICAN MUNITIONS MANUFACTURERS ARE "LILY-WHITE COMPARED TO SOME OF THEM." Keystone photo.

* RATS, LICE AND HISTORY. By Hans Zinsser, M.D. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1935. \$2.75.

will hate me for it, but he reminds me of Hemingway. His first preoccupation is to show that what appears to be a massacre is really an art form. Get far enough away, and a disease becomes positively symphonic. A quiet beginning with a few sporadic cases. Then the crashing splendors of the great epidemics. Finally a dying down to a peaceful equilibrium when the former agent of pestilences causes an occasional headache or sore throat. Such a view would not have consoled most of the thirty million or so persons who had typhus between 1914 and 1924. But if Dr. Zinsser was one of them, as he may well have been, for he certainly has followed typhus about the world, it probably consoled him. So his philosophy is a real philosophy.

Seen through his eyes, the vast muddle and misery of war and disease begins to take on a pattern, as the rout after Caporetto did for Hemingway. He even produces the equivalent of the Old Lady, a "literary friend," who unfortunately succumbs to the vigor of his argument in Chapter II. Nevertheless there are enough digressions to allow us to form a fair idea of whom our author doesn't like. It is a formidable list, including popularizers of science, communists, bankers, new-dealers, Gertrude Stein, Whitehead, and T. S. Eliot, and people whose Christian name is Mungo.

Indeed the book might be called an exercise in digression. And it will be read for the digressions. Its readers will learn what Shelley was thinking about when he wrote about a cloud, why the sage Thales did not marry, when people in mourning started wearing black, and how George Washington was instructed to deal with fleas. In these digressions the author shows a varied learning, and it is clear that he has a large enough store of it to pick out those particular items which make up the pattern that he desires. I like these displays of obscure learning. We found them in Norman Douglas, James Branch Cabell, and Aldous Huxley, and in the last of these, in the chapter on the history of the word "typhus."

Nevertheless, just as I can occasionally catch Cabell and Huxley napping, so I can catch Zinsser. For example, the habit of phthorophagy, or louse-eating, practised by the Budini, is attributed to them by Herodotus, who lived over two thousand years before Wanley, the source here quoted for the anecdote. Herodotus also used the compound word for the custom which I have transliterated above. Read Herodotus, Dr. Zinsser. Like you, he loved digression, and enjoyed tracing historical events to obscure causes. There are a few other slips whose detection I leave to the learned and perspicacious reader.

I wish, too, our author had sometimes spread his net a little more widely. Since violent headache is one of the most striking symptoms of typhus, I should have liked to hear his views on the nature of the fatal disease prevalent among the Sumerians five thousand years ago, whose main feature seems to have been a very intense headache. And at the other end, I should like to hear his views on the quite recent work of Elton, who has succeeded in predicting mouse epidemics correctly some years ahead.

Never mind, Dr. Zinsser must do it again, for unless I am greatly mistaken, this book is going to sell, and the public will ask for more. I do not know of any books on similar topics aimed at American audiences, though of course we have them in Europe. The medical interpretation of history is great fun. There are two ways of doing it. Like Maclaurin in "Post Mortem" and "Mere Mortals" one may reconstruct the medical history of great men and women, Mohammed's fits and Louis XIV's fistula, and thus show how history was influenced at various points. Or one may deal with diseases of ordinary men.

Here I am inclined to join issue with our author. Granting the importance of epidemics, I am still inclined to think that chronic diseases affecting a whole population and permanently lowering its vitality have counted for more in history than pestilences. For example, I do not think the British would ever have conquered India if their way had not been prepared



HANS ZINSSER

by the malaria parasite, and I incline to the view that the American Civil War was won by the hookworm rather than Ulysses S. Grant. So if we must put down the fall of Rome to non-human agencies, I am prepared to back Jones's theory of malaria against Zinsser's epidemic hypothesis.

At the present moment I think such theories may be rather valuable. Since Spengler appropriated Flinders Petrie's theory of the inevitable rise and fall of civilizations we have been rather too apt to believe in our own approaching doom. This gives an excellent excuse to people who are disgusted with politics and would like to sit back anyway. Now whatever else is going to smash our civilization, it probably won't be a disease. So let's all start believing that disease decivilized our predecessors.

At the end of his book our author tells us that this book is not "popular science," a form of production which he detests, and that it is a book of "information." I have taken issue with him on this point. I get some of my income from Mr. John D. Rockefeller, and endeavor to persuade him, or rather his representatives, that what I am doing is worth while. I also get money from the British people, and I think they have a right to be told in words of one syllable what I am doing with it.

The average man and woman derives most of his or her ideas about disease from advertisements, and much of the rest from folklore. I feel that if I try to replace these ideas by something a little more accurate, even if not as accurate as the *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, I am doing something worth while. Dr. Zinsser does not have to read my efforts. They are not meant for him. But he need not detest them.

No. He must face the fact that he is on the way to becoming one of our leading popular scientists. If he succeeds he will at least be able to look forward in old age to an income somewhat larger than he would have earned as the reward of a life spent in a rather heroic struggle with disease. After all, it is no crime to write well. Nicolle, who discovered that typhus was transmitted by lice, was a novelist as well as a scientist.

This book will appeal to three classes of readers. First, those miserable sinners who like popular science. Secondly, amateurs of history who enjoy novel viewpoints and curious anecdotes rather than ponderous and systematic works. Thirdly, people who like to study the reactions of a vigorous human mind to its environment. Perhaps this is the best recommendation of all. Few scientists, even popular scientists, let themselves go about as many different subjects as completely as Dr. Zinsser has done. At the end of the book we can draw up a comprehensive and highly individual catalogue of what he likes and dislikes. I doubt if he will find a single reader who will agree completely with both columns of his list. But read it yourself and find out.

If enough people read it perhaps Dr. Zinsser will do it again. And that will be to the advantage both of science and of literature.

Moments of Peril

THE BREATHLESS MOMENT. Pictures assembled by Philip Van Doren Stern. Introduction and descriptive text by Herbert Asbury. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT DISRAELI

WHEN I received this book and looked through it for the first time the effect upon me was cumulative. I opened it to the first page and there was in one photograph the story of that stark tragedy which was visited upon San Francisco on that memorable April in nineteen-six. A long and deserted street filled with dust and ruin, the aftermath of the earthquake. Then followed pictures of hurricanes in Florida, with the trees bending in agony before the wind; tornadoes in Kansas grotesque as gigantic mushrooms; waterspouts at sea, and other phenomena of nature that can be so catastrophic to man. While these were all interesting and excellent news-shots, the absence of the human element left me emotionally untouched since we tie up experiences of others with our own.

But as I turned the pages and saw pictured all the calamities that are visited upon man by his defiance of nature, of society, of the machine, a chill crept slowly through my body. I saw pictures of sinking ships, wrecked cars, overturned locomotives, and smashed airplanes. The machines striking against their masters and annihilating them with a horrible and complete efficiency. I saw in the pictures of drivers being hurled to death out of colliding and somersaulting race cars, and in the picture of the remains of a stunt parachute jumper who defied death once too often, a totally unnecessary tribute to the sadistic entertainment of our leisure hours. The photographs of those dying legally by the firing squad, the rope, the guillotine, the sword, and the electric chair pictured to me their agonies. I saw and I could hear the moans of the victims.

When I had finished the book I began to think about the causes of these things, and over in my mind the causes that would give rise to the events which these photographs revealed. The feeling of chilly horror became complete. I rushed out (I was alone in my studio) to participate in the trite contacts of the everyday street scene.

The camera is today the true recorder of those phases of life which historians generally gloss over, but which are highly important since they show us the reality, the grossness, or the horror of the evanescent moment. How inadequate is the narrative of an event as compared to its recording by the camera! In a picture of the disastrous Triangle Waist factory fire we see the bodies of girls lying on the street smashed and broken like useless crockery. Immediately we react sympathetically. There rises within us a feeling of horror and of indignation at the causes that make such things possible. Would

we react as quickly to the yellowed accounts of that tragedy written by the reporters of that period? The callousness of time stands between us and those writings; but a photograph of that tragedy or of any human beings in peril, in agony, or death, is timeless. The camera has ensnared time and the picture is of yesterday, today, or of tomorrow.

This is a picture book that must be taken seriously. It is not entertainment, but rather a sad comment on unnecessary death, on cruelty, and on lust. It pictures us as still the playthings of nature and as the unlucky victims of human fallibilities. To many, the contents of this book will be an incentive for hours of discussion about the events and conditions pictured.

The Luxury of Liberty

WAS EUROPE A SUCCESS? By Joseph Wood Krutch. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1935. \$1.

Reviewed by LAURENCE STAPLETON

THE praise of these essays will be higher than they deserve, and the blame more bitter. Few will care to distinguish between, on the one hand, Mr. Krutch's sentiment for liberty and hatred of "Marxian" fanaticism; on the other, his shoddy historical theses and his confused intimations of political principle.

Although cleverly defended, Mr. Krutch's argument fails because his point of view is so parochial. European thought and art are not superior to all others, and were not always the product of freedom and individualism. And communism is not eliminated when the sores of its leaders are uncovered, any more than the French revolution is disgraced by an exposé of the Jacobins.

"Was Europe a Success?" is strongest in its defense of liberty, a term, however, which is not defined. It is meaningless to say that "individuality, and non-conformity, and freedom, are goods in themselves." They are goods only in view of the fact that they are the only things which men, will make that freedom more than a luxury (as Mr. Krutch admits it now is)? To answer, he would have to indicate the economic basis of his thought, which he refuses to do.

One analogy is suggestive. Mr. Krutch compares liberal distress at the advance of the left with the distress of an intelligent Roman at the rise of Christianity. "There must be other old Pagans like myself." One may point out, to reassure him, that Christianity absorbed much of the best of ancient thought, and that "Europe" would be but the poorer without the legacy of the Christian church. And finally, Christianity might have grown up with less struggle, with fewer cultural restrictions, had the Old Pagan pitched in to build a better foundation. "Europe" and the liberal likewise need some restorative stronger than the embalming fluid of the status quo.



QUEEN VICTORIA OF SPAIN BIDS GOOD-BYE TO LOYAL FOLLOWERS AS ROYAL FAMILY GOES INTO EXILE (APRIL 4, 1931)

From "The Breathless Moment."