

## The White Man's East

RETURN TO MALAYA. By R. H. Bruce Lockhart. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936. \$3.

Reviewed by ANDREW A. FREEMAN

THE author of that exciting bit of personal history, "British Agent," forsakes the European scene and turns to the East for a sentimental journey. He is bored with columning for one of Lord Beaverbrook's papers and sets out in quest of his youth.

In his search for this evanescent goal he leads the reader through a maze of encyclopedic trivialities, gossip, anecdote, and high jinks, and finally to observations upon the decline of the white man's prestige in the Far East.

Here is not the glamorous British Agent who was released from a Russian prison in exchange for Litvinoff. Here is a middle-aged British journalist who, with a facile dash, has something to say about everything that strikes his eye during a three-months' vacation in Malaya and in the East Indies.

He recalls that in "British Agent" he referred to "that East which I should never see again." That fatalistic observation relates to the three years he spent, some twenty-five years ago, on a rubber plantation in Pantai, in the Federated Malay States. Here, it seems, he organized a native football team, rode a push bike through the jungle, attended wild parties for departing planters, and carried on an illicit, albeit Loti-esque, affair with Amai, a sloe-eyed maid of Malaya. The wish to see her again is the lode-stone that draws Mr. Lockhart from the stuffiness of Fleet Street to the scenes of his youth.

The meeting with Amai eventually takes place after some 206 pages covering a long trip out, the geography of British Malaya, fleeting glimpses into the lives of the great, and a reunion with cronies in Singapore. The six or more pages he devotes to that tryst of the middle-aged in the jungle is done with beautiful simplicity and tenderness, a little gem in a literary grab bag. Here, at last, the reader gets a glimpse of Malaya before the radio and the motion picture stole into this Eden.

And here Mr. Lockhart takes leave of the scenes of his youth and carries the reader through some 150 pages into what he calls a Javanese interlude. From here the quest for youth becomes a routine



R. H. BRUCE  
LOCKHART

travelogue of the Dutch Islands—Java, Bali, and the Celebes—wherein the author is irked by the ubiquitousness of tourist groups only to find himself with Baedeker in hand impressed by the majesty of Barabodoer and bored by the music and dancing of the Javanese.

What does Mr. Lockhart find in this hasty survey of the East? That the old days are gone; that the pioneering imperialist of his day has vanished; that the prestige of the white man—a fetish that the Occidental is a superior person—has been dissolved in the melting pot of education which the white man has so gratuitously supplied the native; that the rise of nationalism, self-determinism, and the Japanese threat to Britain's might present problems to the white race which no one seems to know how to solve.

The East of Mr. Lockhart is the white man's East dominated by the opinions of residents of foreign colonies who demonstrate their superiority to the Oriental upon the football field and at hotel and club bars at the pahit hour. He passes on what these people have told him as well as information he has gleaned from interviews with British and Dutch officials and with Dutch nationalists.

Mr. Lockhart was shocked when he called upon a Straits-born Chinese who kept his feet upon the desk as he discussed Malaya's future in rubber and tin. Chinese didn't do that when he was in the rubber business in the old days. In Mr. Lockhart's yearning for the past it is to be presumed that he is still the football-playing Britisher who hopes for a Raffles or a Swettenham to come back and save Britain's prestige in Asia.

The reader will appreciate Mr. Lockhart's real affection for the Malayan but if he expects romance or a peep into the private life of an adventurer he is doomed to disappointment.

Andrew Freeman was the first American to edit the Bangkok Daily Mail owned by King Prajadhipok. He has written one book and many articles on Siam.

## Angry Critics

REASONS FOR ANGER. By Robert Briffault. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE C. HOMANS

THIS is a volume of essays by the author of "Europa," selected by him from among those he has written and published in the last few years. They are concerned with social anthropology, in the largest sense, that is, with the behavior of men in organized societies. Particularly, they are concerned with the contrast between what Mr. Briffault says the social order is and what he says it might be. He begins by explaining that some people object to his being angry about the things he is angry about. I am not of that number. Being angry is his business. My business is to show that there is a distinction between his anger and the facts.

Mr. Briffault's prose is easy to read. He writes with talent. But I am at issue with many of his judgments. I have not the space to speak of all of them, and instead I shall go to the other extreme and speak of only one, and that at length. This, I feel, is not a fair way to review a book, and my only excuse is that the judgment in question seems to be one which underlies many of the other lines of thought found in "Reasons for Anger."

One argument, then, recurs in many of these essays. That is that society would be better if "intelligence" controlled the corporate activities of men instead of "venerable institutions fashioned by the stupidity of remote ages." If Mr. Briffault means by "intelligence" logical thought based on observation of the facts, then this can be said on the subject: most people are observed to act upon logical considerations in only a small part of their affairs, chiefly in the affairs of their job. In the other activities of their lives they act in conformity with the customs of the social groups to which they

## Adventurer: Lexington Avenue Express

By ALEXANDER LAING

COSTELLO planned his course from Trebizond, Skirting the Maldives, thence by Sunda Strait—Which made Costello reach the office late, Dream-sodden, quite unable to respond With vigor such as managers are fond Of noting, in a fifth subordinate. Wretched Costello therefore got the gate And stood upon the brink of the beyond.

Far places suddenly were very near; But friends—alas!—urged him to be discreet. He sighed, and found a job invoicing beer: Half the old pay cheque, but he still could eat And travel his ten thousand miles a year Between the darkest Bronx and Beaver Street.

belong, accepting these customs not because they have made a calculation of their utility but simply because they are customs. (Sometimes they like to say that they are acting logically, but that is another question.) Some of these customs are "venerable institutions," others appeared recently. In any factory, for instance, new customs, governing the relations of men one to another, are observed to form all the time.

This must happen if societies are to remain healthy. Most men, if they have to make decisions for themselves about any large part of their behavior, do not in fact make up their minds, but remain in the endless worry, without issue, which is called obsession. Suicides and neurotics appear in greatest numbers when the non-logical customs of a society are breaking down, or when men move out of the society in which they were brought up without being assimilated into another society.

This is true, so far as is now known, of all societies which have existed in the past and will probably remain true of all future societies we can envisage. This is important, because Mr. Briffault admires, as a foretaste of the society of the future, the community now in process of construction in Russia. Stalin is a great man, but there is no reason to believe that if he and his colleagues contrive a successful society it will have bases different in kind from those of the successful societies of the past. Systems of customs, new and old, accepted without process of logic, will govern most of the behavior of the masses. The logical thinking will be done by a few intelligent men, largely concentrated at the top of the hierarchy, who will be concerned about two jobs: maintaining the adequate non-logical customs of their society, and adjusting its economy to changing circumstances. There will not be, and there cannot be, any large proportion of deeds done because the doers have taken thought, though Mr. Briffault expects this of his society of the future. The proportion may be larger than it now is in America—there has been a slow progress in this direction through the ages—but probably not by much.

I have long thought that what its angry critics had to say about it was not as damning of the present social order as the fact that they were angry, and that there were coming to be more and more of them. Mr. Briffault's book has not led me to change this judgment. The sources of men's anger are deep. They may speak of one thing as irritating them, because they are unable to speak, and do not know, of the other thing that is in fact irritating them. At the level of the unconscious springs of human thought and action must be sought the gravest evils that threaten society.

Mr. Homans is a member of the Society of Fellows of Harvard University.

# The Present Age in Embryo

*THE GLITTERING CENTURY.* By Phillips Russell. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1936. \$3.50.

Reviewed by FRANCIS WILLIAMSON

WHEN Voltaire wrote that "nothing is more annoying than to be obscurely hanged," he did not foresee that he was living in one of the most highly publicized epochs in human history. The eighteenth century has inspired a variety of historians, for it is a colorful and important era. To Phillips Russell it is a glittering century, rich in the varied types of personalities which it produced, and important, for its "ideas, attitudes, vices, follies . . . were the embryos of our own." The book lays Voltaire's fear of an obscure posterity, for his age is examined once again and found worthy of restrained and sympathetic praise.

It was, indeed, a glittering century which opened with the systematized grandeur of the court of Louis XIV and died a logical death in 1815 with the destruction of the last classical hero, Napoleon. It was a glittering century in its material remains. The favored of men busied themselves with the art of living, and the insistence on details testifies to the preoccupation with the niceties of life.

It was a glittering century in its ideas. It was the age in which man, according to Immanuel Kant, freed himself from his self imposed state of minority. At least, the men of the eighteenth century liked to think they were mature. They threw off the restraints of former ages and relied on the power of reason to better the lot of man. It was a century of hope. Man shifted his utopia from the past to the future and looked to an ultimate happiness, rational, utilitarian, and universal.

The eighteenth century glitters in the types of people which it produced. Mr. Russell marvels at the modern nature and the self-assurance of the men of that day, speaking as they did "with our voice and accent." His book is a series of biographical sketches of various types—kings, philosophers, courtesans, economists, assassins, ministers, and lackeys ranging all the way from Russia to America, and from the king's bedchamber to the peasant's hovel. The central theme of this compendium is the destruction of absolutism, the rise of the middle class, and the creation of the "merchant state." Considered in itself, the rise of the bourgeoisie must have been an exceedingly dull affair, for it is the subject of many dull books. It becomes a glittering subject when Mr. Russell symbolizes the triumph of the bourgeoisie by Louis XV's choice of Madame Pompadour as mistress. The rest of the story is told largely by innuendo, although there



AN EVENING AT THE SALON OF MADAME GEOFFRIN. Aquatint by Debucourt, from "The Glittering Century."

is a sketch of Turgot and references to Adam Smith and Franklin. The death of absolutism is revealed in biographical sketches of Charles XII of Sweden, Peter the Great, various and fatuous Bourbons, Catherine the Great, and countless others.

Mr. Russell might be asked how he could talk of the death of absolutism when confronted with such despotic things as Newtonian science, formal gardens, the music of Rameau, and the French "Encyclopédie." He admits quite frankly that "historians have not much helped us," although historians do include Robespierre and the Reign of Terror in any account of the rise of the bourgeois state. Of course, the difficulties of selection are tremendous in writing any biographical compendium, but the disregard of Mozart, Goethe, and only one whiff of Dr. Johnson need wring only the withers of specialists. Suffice it to say, Mr. Russell handles his material in an interesting fashion. The book is readable, not through any penetrating insight into the historical processes of the century so much as through the fact that his history is not "a pack of tricks we play on the dead." The characters are alive, and vibrate with all that cynical zest of life which marked the eighteenth century.

Mr. Russell, moreover, draws his contrasts well. Was it conscious irony that in his book, the picture of that bourgeois courtesan Madame Pompadour should face the description of the Methodist young lady of Ilslington who went into contortions because "the dogs of hell were gnawing her heart"?

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