

A Letter from London

BY SALLY FULTON

THE English reading public is, at the moment, divided into two distinct classes: those who think Damon Runyon should be knighted and those who think he should be "crowned." He has started, with his flip Eighth Avenue jargon, one of the most lively literary controversies of the past few years. On one side are those who "are constrained to disapprove of Mr. Runyon's liberties with the King's English" and on the other those who think Dancing Dan, Ooky Mockie Morgan, Harry the Horse, Gunner Jack, and Gammer O'Neill are "the nuts!"

The London *Evening Standard*, fishing around for a new feature, started the controversy. Lord Beaverbrook bought the English newspaper rights to Runyon's "More Than Somewhat" and ran one story a day in the *Standard*. The paper praised the stories on its front page, printed glowing biographical sketches of Runyon, and proudly published them with gangster woodcuts on the center double spread.

All of which annoyed one H. K. Hales, Esq. more than somewhat. H. K. Hales, Esq., wrote in to say it was "indecent" to call a lady a "moll" and a gentleman a "guy." He thought, furthermore, that if the great English dailies were not to uphold the tradition of good English, well, it was a deplorable situation!

And that started something. Give an Englishman an opportunity to write letters to the editor and he'll knock the top off England's big red pillar boxes. And that's just exactly what the Englishmen have been doing ever since H. K. Hales "was constrained" to complain.

Letters have poured into the *Standard* ever since. The paper's circulation has bounded up; and Lord Beaverbrook's only immediate worry is where he's going to get more Runyon stories.

This is, however, an aside. The important lines in the comedy are written by the letter-writers:

When Mr. Hales says that Mr. Runyon's stories are tedious, boring and full of undesirable American slang, he

understates the case. They are a positive menace to the English language. The suggestion of Mr. Dennis B. Grundy that a club be formed for the "preservation" of "pure Runyonese" is an example of the terrible effect produced upon certain individuals when backed by a responsible newspaper.

—E. S. Clay, Escher, Surrey.

For the love of Mike, stop it! Some American slang is amusing, some is simply putrid. Runyon's is the latter variety. This miserable stuff has such an unpleasant effect on my nervous system that I now carefully avoid opening my *Evening Standard* lest I should see Runyon in it.

—St. John Hamilton,
Kingsgate-on-Sea, Kent.

Then, on the other hand, are these:

Seriously, though in a minor sphere, Runyon is comparable to Shakespeare and Milton as an improvisator of language. Runyon should be rated a genius for breaking so much new ground.

—G. D. R. Planton, London, S. W. 11

Judging from the high-falutin tone adopted by the anti-Runyonites, the English language is the unique and spotless creation of a divine instant. No doubt these staunch supporters of literary purity dislike Charles Dickens who employed Cockney slang never found in any dictionary: Thomas Hardy who used West Country idiom, also marked by its absence from the Oxford Concise.

—Henry Gibbs, London, N. W. 6

Damon Runyon is terrific. . . . Mr. Hales' monumental letter is an epitaph to sluggish Victorianism.

—Peter Taylor, London, S. W. 7

While this battle rages, London is in the midst of the Fifth Annual Sunday Times Book Fair, and British authors are making plans to get out of the London winter . . . Somerset Maugham is temporarily in the city, lunching with great leisure around the Strand and getting his belongings together for another winter sojourn . . . This year he's going to India

to study ancient temples . . . Bruce Lockhart had luncheon with him the other day and soon after announced he was saying farewell to Fleet Street for good . . . Lockhart's son Robin is seventeen years old now, a sailor in the King's Navy, and Lockhart, at fifty, is starting a new chapter in his life of adventure . . . He has returned to his native Scottish heath for the moment, but he'll soon be going to Scandinavia on a lecture tour . . . After that he's going back to take a look at the Balkans, write a book on his experiences there, and then, perhaps in 1939, he'll return to Russia for the first time since the Revolution . . . The six-penny Penguin Books—never mention the word Penguin before a London publisher!—are beginning to have their troubles . . . The rising cost of newsprint is cutting into their slim per-copy profit—the publisher must sell 13,000 of each title before he breaks even—and they may take advertising in order to meet their added costs.

. . . Hervey Allen shocked the British pride by announcing that the best plumbing to be found in Britain today is in the old Roman houses being excavated . . . Allen, who is doing a short book on evidences of Roman civilization in Britain, recently spent some time here and then went on to Germany to see about getting some of his unpaid royalties on "Anthony Adverse."

Sally Fulton is the wife of an American newspaper correspondent in London.

Magellan and Mutiny

DEATH SAILS WITH MAGELLAN. By Charles Ford. New York: Random House. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by OLIVER LA FARGE

THE amazing story of Magellan's voyage is such a natural that it is surprising that more writers have not seized upon it as the basis of historical novels or epic poems. Mr. Ford seems to know enough about Magellan's voyage in general, and the island of Guam in particular, to be a thorough master of his material. His plot invites direct comparison with "Mutiny on the Bounty," and also with the non-fiction story of Will Marriner. But he fails as a novelist, mainly because he has attempted to superimpose a fictional form, for the greater part of his story, upon what is essentially a popular non-fictional narrative of Magellan's voyage with a new interpretation of the commander and his purposes. The characterization of Gonzalo, the hero, is always faulty and unconvincing; the subordinate characters in the main belong to the wooden stock of the great mass of historical writing descended by the left hand from Sir Walter Scott; and the picture of Magellan as an insane megalomaniac defeating his own ends by utterly unreasonable actions could not be convincing, unless the author were able to take us inside of the commander's mind, a feat which is beyond his ability. Nevertheless, wherever Mr. Ford is released from his fictional requirements, his descriptions are vivid, building up true and unforgettable pictures of a vanished time.



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Books from the Loyalist Front

VOLUNTEER IN SPAIN. By John Sommerfield. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1937. \$1.50.

FROM SPANISH TRENCHES, Letters collected and edited by Marcel Acier. New York: Modern Age Books, Inc. 1937. Paper, 35c.; cloth, 85c.

Reviewed by CHARLES A. THOMSON

THE first of these books is by a volunteer, not a "volunteer." It comes not from the regimented thousands dispatched by Italian or German dictators to fight for Franco. The author is an English communist, just under thirty, who views the fight of the Spanish Loyalists as one phase of the international struggle against fascism. He enlisted at Paris, and after a few weeks training behind the lines, reached Madrid with the International Column, "a last, desperate hope" launched against the advancing rebels during those critical days of early November, 1936. He was in the fighting at University City and Casa del Campo, which stopped Franco at the gates of the capital.

His pages bring the Spanish war close-up. It is seen from the angle of the man in the ranks—through eyes which are unusually keen and discerning. There are glimpses of the impatience of the recruit for the front, the exasperation and heartbreaks over inadequate equipment, the unutterable fatigue from long marches and back-bending loads, nights on the hills with rain coming down "cold, thin and intensely wet," the anonymity enforced on the common soldier and the "fine state of automatic apathy" to which he must school himself, the impersonal killing of the enemy, and the bitterly personal loss of one's comrades. Full light is thrown on the crude vileness of war. But the soldier is carried along by the driving endurance of his fellows in the International Column, and by the vitality and matter-of-fact heroism of the Spanish people. There is also the support of his personal credo—the faith which had overcome former hatred of war—that in the Spanish struggle there is something worth fighting for, and it is "something real."

For some the greatest interest of the book will lie rather in what it reveals about John Sommerfield than in what it tells of the Spanish conflict; how a sensitive and realistic mind comes through a bout with the bruising facts of modern war. Here is one of the very few books yet from Spain which are worth while in their own right. It stands far above the run of current war journalism. Much of its prose is so finely and honestly tempered as to have the stripped beauty of truth.

"From Spanish Trenches" contains a collection of letters and diary material, written by foreigners with the Loyalists' troops—Germans, Russians, Dutchmen, a Cuban, as well as Englishmen, Irishmen, and Americans. Most of the letters—particularly those by Americans—present little of lasting significance. Perhaps the

most valuable contributions are by Jef Last, a Dutch novelist, and Pablo de la Torriente Brau, a young Cuban journalist. No one has sketched a more vivid picture than Last does here, of the gallant, confused, and undisciplined Popular Militia as they were rolled back by the rebels in the fall of 1936.

Charles A. Thomson is a member of the staff of the Foreign Policy Association.

The Nazi Mind

I KNEW HITLER. By Kurt G. W. Ludecke. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1937. \$3.75.

Reviewed by SAMUEL NOCK

IN this book, it is a Nazi who speaks. Kurt Ludecke was one of Hitler's first enthusiastic followers; and, if one can believe him, one of the few who could tell Hitler where to get off.

One can't believe him, of course. Enthusiasm dictates his writing, enthusiasm narrates his anecdotes. On the other hand, one cannot help believing in the emotions aroused by that same enthusiasm.

Here frankly, proudly, are antisemitism, advocacy of violence, calumny of such men as Bruening and Stresemann, and adulation of such men as Rosenberg. Here is worship of the Fuehrer, though combined with a certain amount of disillusionment. Here, in short, is a revelation of how the Nazi mind works; and it is a most depressing picture. It is a disconcerting confirmation of the theory propounded in this magazine by Dr. C. G. Jung. It is unreason triumphant.

Even though the author was Hitler's prisoner, even though he had to flee from his Nazis, even though he lives in exile, he has acquired no reasonableness, no perspective, no sense. Like the lawyer to whom the defense was entrusted, he goes bellowing on to the last.

What will perhaps interest American readers is not the fury, but the episodes involving Henry Ford and the Sunday Evening Hour prophet, W. J. Cameron. In 1924 these men were, according to Herr Ludecke, greatly interested in Hitler. Cameron was, he hints, interested enough to think well of spending some of Ford's money; but Ford was too smart. He listened, but he did not contribute.

It is pleasing to read that the German-American societies, before whom Ludecke appeared to praise Hitler, practically gave him the bum's rush. The American monkey-suited Nazis are not going to destroy the Republic.

In a good Nazi style, this book is more than fifty per cent too long; it is full of all sorts of irrelevant nonsense and repetitious twaddle; it has verbal quantity, but not quality. Yet for any one who wants to know something about how Nazis operate in this country—and to laugh at their breath-taking ineptitude—and for any one who wants to look into a Nazi's mind, this piece of exhibitionism will be valuable. Herr Ludecke conceals nothing; and therefore his last-page wishful-thinking that Hitler may perhaps yet lead the world to salvation, makes the Scriptural dog seem a creature of elegant and fastidious taste.