

Nibbling at the Lion's Tail

THE DEFENSE OF THE EMPIRE. By Sir Norman Angell. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company. 1937. \$2.

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

spondents chosen to accompany General Mariotti's flying column, south from Massawa across the torrid wastes of Dankalia and up to the plateau to Azbi. His gripping story of the battle of Ende Gorge, where the Ethiopians attempted to ambush the invading troops, deserves to rank high among *bona fide* thrillers. Marshal Badoglio's motorized drive from Dessye to Addis Ababa provided the other highlight of the African assignment. In ten days—half of which were spent in boosting three thousand trucks up a hastily improvised road to Terna-ber Pass—he covered 250 miles. After that the triumphal entry into the Ethiopian capital proved something of an anti-climax.

The almost picnic atmosphere which pervades the Ethiopian chronicle disappears when Matthews comes to Spain. He still has adventures—witness his wild ride under machine-gun and artillery fire to the Arganda Bridge, thus making clear that the insurgents had not cut Madrid's road to Valencia. But he presents the clearest, and despite evident partisanship, the most trustworthy picture of war on the Loyalist side, which has yet appeared in this country. His eyes are fixed mainly on the fighting and his references to politics, to war industry, and to conditions behind the lines are few and scant. The book spans the period from December 1936 until the Belchite offensive on the Aragon front in August and September. Two chapters are given to the March battle of Brihuega, when 30,000 to 40,000 Italians swept down toward Guadalajara in an attempt to cut off Madrid, and were finally driven back in a panic-stricken rout. Hailing the part played by the International Brigade, the author declares "the victory was not national but international: the anti-Fascists had defeated the Fascists—that was the chief significance of Brihuega."

Matthews attempts to give a detailed statement of the foreign aid received by both sides. In contrast with the International Brigade, whose maximum strength he puts at 15,000 to 20,000, he estimates the Italian "expeditionary army" to number between 100,000 and 150,000. His chapters on "The Internationals" and "The American Battalions" will prove of special interest to many. Russian assistance to the government has been of major importance, but he argues that outside assistance to the Loyalists is now declining in significance. The government is making rapid progress in replacing foreign personnel, in infantry, aviation, and staff.

Matthews does not seek to maintain a "plague on both your houses" attitude. In Ethiopia his sympathies were with the Italians. In Spain he stands with the Loyalists and against the Italian invaders. He writes as a partisan, but he does so frankly and openly.

See page 19 for biographical note on Herbert L. Matthews.

WHATEVER the outcome of the present deterioration in international amity, at least one result can be predicted: future historians will devote many volumes in explanation of the puzzling reversals in British foreign policy. Why, they will ask, did Britain allow the League of Nations to fail at the very moment when it might have been most useful for safeguarding the Empire? Why did the Conservatives, traditionally devoted to imperialism, applaud Mussolini as he severed the imperial trade route? Why did the British Government jeopardize the historic balance of power by permitting Hitler to destroy the Locarno settlement and promote fascism in Spain? Perhaps the scholars of 2038 will comprehend these variations on the ancient theme of "muddling through."

Sir Norman Angell anticipates posterity by seeking to clarify the mysterious contradictions so prevalent at Whitehall. Although marred by some careless writing and proofreading, the analysis contains much of the insight, humor, and idealism for which its author has long been famous. Employing what might be called an "emotional theory of history," Angell asserts that Britain's leading statesmen and publicists have been led by certain *idees fixes* to act against their economic and political interests. Having prayed since 1920 for the downfall of the League of Nations, the ruling classes cheered its defeat in both the Manchurian and Ethiopian episodes, without realizing that paralysis at Geneva brought Japan and Italy athwart the lifelines of the British Empire. Communism likewise has so long been a hobgoblin of these men of property and patriotism that they have automatically favored every movement which might weaken the Soviet Union, even though under Stalin the world revolution has been indefinitely postponed. British capitalists, says Sir

Norman Angell, have yet to discover that it is their anti-communist protégés—Mussolini, Hitler, Hirohito, and Franco—who are actually menacing their material and spiritual possessions. By straining at a communist gnat, they have swallowed a fascist camel.

The British Empire will not be safe from aggression, the author declares, until there exists a system of collective security backed by overwhelming force. If Germany had known in 1914 that aggression would create an invincible alliance including even the United States, the World War would not have occurred; if Germany and other states knew today that aggression would immediately provoke universal resistance, both peace and justice would be possible. Neither re-

gional alliances nor rearmament can secure a British victory over the "have-not" countries, which have been encouraged to nibble in unison. German demands for revision of the Versailles Treaty, he agrees, must be impartially examined and generously met, but resort to war before or after a settlement of grievances must be confronted by community sanctions. Collective security and Empire security become identical.

The American reader will find much to praise in this astute appraisal of British motives and persuasive argument for bolder policy, but will probably take exception to the introductory presentation of the British Empire as the epitome of altruistic internationalism. By limiting his discussion to the Dominions, independent of England except for sentimental ties, Sir Norman Angell omits the vast congeries of dependent colonies, territories, and mandates, and overlooks the restrictions which the closed door, tariffs, and the Ottawa preferences impose upon international trade. By never looking at the Empire from the outside, he never really appreciates the German case. Although his criticism of the past is praiseworthy, his recommendations for the future require amplification before those outside the Empire will be disposed to cooperate.

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NORMAN ANGELL

Boyhood in Wales

THE WOODEN SPOON. By Wyn Griffith.
New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1938.
\$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

WYN GRIFFITH'S story of his boyhood in a Welsh village is a marvel of much in little. The tale itself is slight and severely unadorned, but there are evocative half-strokes here and there, quick, suggestive phrases, emotions not mentioned but seen and sensed, all of which envelop the little story in a whole atmosphere of experience. It seems to be Griffith's unusual method of writing which gets that fresh, unstudied effect for him. For he goes at his story from two angles and takes us into his confidence as he goes. He is the writer looking back at his youth, and we sit at his side and hear him discuss his ideas aloud, what he means to write about, his anxiety to be unliterary and to approximate the raw truth of a boy's life; and suddenly we are beguiled into forgetting the artifices even as he disclaims them, and we are deep in the consciousness of this Welsh youth.

Certainly it is clear that Griffith's over-

weening modesty, perhaps the most sophisticated of devices, masks a confident, powerful expressiveness. Only a sure talent could say so little of poverty and yet make of it so real and poignant an element, or place the Welsh landscape, sea, sky, so immediately before us with scarcely a paragraph anywhere that is devoted to solid description. The boy himself, Ned, is as elemental a figure in the little Welsh world as one of the cattle he tends, or the earth itself. He, with his parents and the other farmers and seamen of the village, lives according to the simple, unthinking rituals that have come to them out of their long island history. The carving of the wooden spoon of betrothal, the theme which carries the book to its surprising finish, is only one of the many rituals and magics that appear, and there is a most beautiful tale of faith and evil, eleven pages long, that breaks into the narrative suddenly, toward the end, to give us a brief vision of the poetry of Wales. It matters little, with all of this, to note that Griffith does slip into some of the literary habits he fears, some worn phrasings, some obvious mannerisms. They cannot mar the essential freshness and vigor of his work.

Persian Wedding

THE WELL OF ARARAT. By Emmanuel Varandyan. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by COURTLANDT CANBY

THIS is not really a novel. It is a highly colored, detailed painting of a wedding in a Persian-Armenian village of Northwestern Persia, a varied genre scene of a complex traditional ceremony entered into by the likable and genuinely depicted peasants of this village with all their souls and imaginations. The whole is seen simply and effectively through the eyes of a young boy, who conceives an adolescent passion for the beautiful bride. This thread of story, complicated by the bride's secret love for Aris, the best man, is held in slow suspense while the long wedding ceremonies, lasting many days, are painted in with a careful brush, with a love for the mystical and the poetic in the old traditions that is truly Persian. The wedding out of the way, the author releases the plot to a sudden and harrowing climax of the duel of willow whips between Aris and the bridegroom in the night. The scene is



EMMANUEL
VARANDYAN

overwhelming, but on second thought one wonders if the end has not been too sudden and violent after the slow-moving body of the book.

For the description of the wedding (which fills most of the book) as a beautifully told study of ceremony is perfect, but as a part of a story, of a novel, it is in too much detail for modern readers; the action moves too slowly. Yet personally, I would not like to see a word cut out of it. The author's style is unaffected and simple, and his descriptive powers quite equal to the most complex scene before him.

There is something in the book that raises it above a mere genre scene, and that is the quietly insistent emphasis on the modern innovations which were filtering into this and other villages from Russia in the days just before the war. The young

men all want to be revolutionists, the old men are troubled by the slow violation of the ancient traditions which rule their lives. In this gradual seeping in of change may be read the whole history of modern Persia and of the East. It is this which keeps the book from seeming too exotic, too unreal.



From the jacket of "Under Capricorn."

Drama Down Under

UNDER CAPRICORN. By Helen Simpson. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE inlet on the coast of New South Wales called Botany Bay is famous in song and story for the first establishment there of the English penal settlement, but at the end of the eighteenth century the settlement was removed from its shores to near the site of Sydney. Miss Simpson, who is a fourth generation Australian, has seized upon this historical background with relish, and written a rattling good romance of the time, beginning with the arrival of a new English Governor in 1831. With Sir Richard Bourke comes his debonair and reckless young cousin, Charles Adair, to seek his fortune in a new land. In the home of the astonishing Samson Flusky, Esq. he encounters a lost lady of mystery, plunged into dipsomania, the Lady Henrietta, who married a felon, now an Emancipist in this new strange world. In Flusky and Lady Henrietta Miss Simpson has created two characters that would have vastly appealed to Stevenson, and the young English hero is both dashing and appealing.

At the start, the author speaks of her "highly-coloured, improbable, and yet simple story." That is accurate, but as a graphic romance in a strange setting, "Under Capricorn" is better than the general run. The hot and crowded streets of the new and difficult colony swarm with strange life. The private affairs of the chief characters furnish plenty of suspense. The book has atmosphere and verve, and fully acquaints one with the drama of early Sydney.

See page 19 for biographical note on Helen Simpson.