

Mussolini and the British

ITALY AGAINST THE WORLD. By George Martelli. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1938. \$3.75.

Reviewed by VERA MICHELES DEAN

NO book could be more timely at this moment, when the democratic peoples of Britain and the United States are weighing the relative merits of neutrality and intervention in the Far Eastern crisis, than this balanced and penetrating account of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict by a correspondent of the *London Morning Post*. With a discrimination rare in journalistic appraisals of international affairs, Mr. Martelli marshals the arguments presented by Italy, Ethiopia, and the League powers, always probing for facts and motives behind diplomatic verbiage. Particularly valuable is his critical analysis of the attitude displayed by the British public and the British cabinet during a crisis which proved a decisive test not only of collective security but of Britain's foreign policy.

The points brought out by Mr. Martelli are by no means new, but they are set forth with refreshing candor. He makes clear that the ideal of collective security, which in 1919 seemed to offer an alternative to war, failed of realization because the great democracies, in the post-war period, were less concerned with the security of all states, including the vanquished, than with preservation of the *status quo*; and because each successive crisis—Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain—was viewed by them not as a threat to collective security, but as a threat to their widely divergent national interests. Britain, which after the war had done everything in its power to diminish the striking power of the League as long as the League was primarily used by France to coerce Germany, tried to breathe new spirit into the Geneva institution in 1935, when its own imperial interests seemed threatened by Italy's plans to conquer Ethiopia; and this just at the moment when France, fearful of German expansion on the continent, was least anxious to antagonize Italy by application of the very sanctions it had previously advocated against the Reich.

Nor were British voters clear in their own minds regarding the course they wanted Britain to follow. The very people who had cast their vote in the 1935 Peace Ballot for economic—and many of them for military—sanctions, had in the past vigorously opposed British rearmament, which might have made action against Italy effective. By contrast, fire-eating imperialists who could have been expected to oppose Italian expansion in Africa, were least eager to provoke a conflict which, they feared, might substitute for Mussolini the less attractive alter-

native of communism. The brunt of Mr. Martelli's criticism, however, is borne by the National government which, for electioneering purposes, created the impression that it was ready to fight to the last ditch on behalf of collective security, when its record proves that its leaders—notably Mr. Baldwin and Sir Samuel Hoare—had never intended to take any action which might antagonize Italy and thus create the risk of a war they were determined to avoid. In other words, while paying lip-service to collective security, they had from the start excluded

the possibility of really effective sanctions such as an oil embargo, and had never even contemplated the use of military sanctions. The British cabinet wanted to have their cake and eat it too. In thus attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable, it created the illusion, soon shattered by the Hoare-Laval deal, that Britain was ready to put all the weight of its great economic power behind collective security; and strengthened the impression, not always justly held abroad, that the British hypocritically throw the cloak of moral principles over actions and policies no less self-seeking than those of other peoples.

Vera Micheles Dean is editor of the *Foreign Policy Association*.

Six Heroic Survivors

THE FATE OF THE GROSVENOR. By Jonathan Lee. New York: Covici-Friede. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by IRVIN ANTHONY

FROM its start "The Fate of the *Grosvenor*" reaches after a generous authenticity. Mr. Jonathan Lee reconstructs the casting away of the staunch East Indiaman on the coast of Africa. Some hundred men sailed from Trincomalee on June 13, 1782, in the *Grosvenor*. One hundred seventeen days later six of them made Capetown in an ox-cart. They were the only survivors. Mr. Lee found the facts of the case heroic, but pitifully terse. He felt the vital, moving story of the ship's people and their adventure. Perforce, to tell it, he has imagined much. Upon the flimsiest of evidence he has had to create the moods of those who lived to trek the tragic miles. In major matters he has been faithful. He has not invented a single one of his characters. He has only selected, well and bravely, from among those offered.

The story falls into two parts: life on the *Grosvenor*, and life after the shipwreck in the wilderness of Pongoland. Mr. Lee has taken liberties. There is some curious stowage of cargo: pepper and porcelain, and odd hours for the swinging of hammocks. There are moments when the seamen in the *Grosvenor*, under almost man-of-war disci-

pline, speak sentiments not unlike those of the unionized mariner of our own day. Just as the people of the ship threaten to turn stock, and acknowledge their parentage among the clans of Marryat, Cooper, Smollett, and Clark Russell, the *Grosvenor* piles upon the rocks and Mr. Lee leads the survivors ashore.

At once the author is happier, even if his people are not. He has been in Pongoland before, and, with first-hand knowledge at his disposal, he watches his adventurers undertake the dark continent. The characters come to life. The stark, high truth grows. After that, there is nothing for the reader to do but follow breathlessly to the last day of triumph, when a handful of scarecrows blink stupidly at a decently dressed white man, unable to understand that they have really done it: they have escaped from the spell of space and have fallen upon an outpost, an entrance to the civilization of the Cape.

Let the earnest-minded question Mr. Lee's right to improvise emotions and reactions for his eighteenth century characters. The result seems to justify any liberties taken, when the intensity of the relation grips the reader and will not let him go. It may be that parts of the story are at variance with the unknown truth, but the verisimilitude is convincing and there can be only grateful appreciation for the power of the grim tale.



DRAWING BY JOHN ALAN MAXWELL
From "The Fate of the *Grosvenor*."

Blind on Beacon Hill

BOUNDARY AGAINST NIGHT. By Edmund Gilligan. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by JOSEPH F. DINNEEN

IN a mass drowning when the sub-chaser *Ocra* strikes a mine off the Massachusetts coast during the war, the sea reluctantly gives up Benjamin Coventry, a Boston blueblood, who returns stone blind to a Beacon Hill populated by abnormal neighbors. Something is wrong with everybody, even the cop on the beat. The characters introduced are either oversexed, undersexed, prostitutes, or perverts, and those whose lives the blind man touches are deformed or emasculated. Persons die naturally, starve to death, are murdered or commit suicide, and are disposed of with such dispatch that the reader has little opportunity to become acquainted with them.

The plot is elusive, escapes frequently, and I found myself going back, rereading passages and pages with an exasperating feeling that somewhere I had skipped something or had slipped over the keys and explanations. The scene shifts from Beacon Hill to Sudbury, and Wayside Inn is mentioned casually; and some of the same characters, among them the policeman and his prostitute wife, are moved from Beacon Hill to Sudbury.

Soldiers come back from the World War in much the same way they came back from the Civil War, walking home painfully (unlikely, because when soldiers were mustered out they got commutation and fare—and the State gave each a \$100 bonus. There are buses and trains from Boston to Sudbury and were then). One of them buries his arm, shot off in France (an impossible touch), at a weird midnight ceremony in Sudbury. The next day one of the soldiers, in whom the reader has been interested for half the book, sees his mother and shoots himself.

At about this time there is introduced



EDMUND GILLIGAN

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the story of a prostitute near Sudbury who used her faithless lover's fresh grave for his successors.

Some of the remaining characters come back from Sudbury to Boston on the eve of the Boston Police strike. Calvin Coolidge makes a brief appearance, but nobody who knew Cal will recognize him except for his name. Here Gilligan changes pace, and the story becomes a series of bulletins. In the riot that follows the strike, a girl from Sudbury whom blind Benjamin was to marry is raped four times by Negroes on Beacon Hill. All of the characters are killed, and blind Benjamin, shot between the eyes on T Wharf, falls overboard to be swept out to sea and joins his shipmates on the *Ocra*.

It is obviously the end and purpose of the book to dramatize the Boston police strike as a night of looting and rapine, and when he gets to this point, Gilligan succeeds in doing it very well. There are patches of beautiful writing, but there are times when the story and its characters are bewildering and contradictions repeatedly baffle the reader.

Gilligan was a reporter in Boston and many of us recognize his patrolman Hargedon, and to those who know, his presentation is a masterpiece. Unfortunately readers elsewhere do not and his picture will be lost upon them. Gilligan has had this one in his system for a long time and now that he is rid of it, his next should be a real and important novel.

Joseph F. Dinneen is a Boston journalist and author of "Ward Eight."

When Queer People Act More Queerly

THE MOON IS MAKING. By Storm Jameson. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HERBERT J. MULLER

WHEN its jacket announces that "The Moon Is Making" has "a plot which cannot be summarized and an appeal which cannot be defined," there would seem to be little for an ordinary reviewer to say. But actually, one of the characters gets within striking distance at least of the appeal. "You know they say that when the moon is making, queer people behave more queerly," he remarks "slyly." This novel is full of queer people, and the moon is pretty consistently on the make. Miss Jameson's treatment of this subject, however, is hardly sly: she is much in earnest, and at the end explicit.

Most of the action centers about the Wikker family, living in the little Yorkshire town of Wik. With one exception, its older members are grotesquely avaricious, gross, malicious, cruel—as monstrous a set as a hardened contemporary could ask for. But Miss Jameson dwells upon them chiefly to emphasize the one exception, Handel Wikker; it is he who finally dominates the novel and embodies



STORM JAMESON

her main intention. Loathing all injustice, he attempts to practise literally the teachings of Christ. He is in other words perhaps the queerest of the lot; and so he is driven to his death by an outraged community.

It is perhaps both unnecessary and unfair to say that "The Moon Is Making" suffers by comparison with, say, "The Brothers Karamazov." But if Miss Jameson could not, by taking thought, become Dostoevsky, she might profitably have studied his intensive method. The most serious specific fault of her novel lies in her technique. She has strung together many short episodes, each centering in some one of the older Wikkers or their offspring, and the focus shifts before the scene has been solidly developed. In striving for size and breadth she has achieved mostly diffuseness; even her main intention is lost in the shuffle, not emerging clearly until near the end. Drama is further deadened by the weight of mere exposition entailed in moving some fifty characters through as many years.

"The Moon Is Making" is nevertheless a respectable achievement. Considering that Handel Wikker often expresses her own deep convictions, Miss Jameson tells his story with laudable fairness and restraint. More to the point, she renders her Yorkshire landscape vividly, and without losing sight of her characters. She makes her queer people credible, occasionally memorable. Ann, Semiramis, and Ezekiel Wikker are, despite their repulsiveness, not only human but impressive; they take on a kind of monstrous grandeur in their unquenchable vitality, the integrity and force with which to the end they continue to be themselves, without apology, pretense, or self-pity. And when Handel Wikker finally emerges from the crowd to take over the center of the stage, the drama approaches austere tragedy.

Herbert J. Muller is the author of "Modern Fiction: A Study of Values." See page 22 for biographical note on Storm Jameson.