



ISAK DINESEN ON HER AFRICAN FARM

African Earth

OUT OF AFRICA. By Isak Dinesen. New York: Random House. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

"I HAD a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills." Isak Dinesen's story begins as simply as that, and continues without visible artifice, fluently and precisely, to tell of the author's life on a Kenya coffee farm. It will be wondered, perhaps, that "Seven Gothic Tales" and this book should stem from the same talent, but I feel no discrepancy there; the strange, ecletic light of the earlier stories is nearly that of the Ngong Hills when the rains are starting, or when the terrible grasshoppers half obscure the sun; that farm, though its flax and coffee failed, could most credibly grow the Gothic Tales.

For twelve years the author struggled to make a go of it, supported in sympathy by the dark people she loved, the Kikuyu, who had a home no longer since the whites had taken his land, the proud Somali, the Masai warrior who lived upon milk and blood and walked with "his chin stretched forward, as if he were presenting you his sullen, arrogant face upon a tray." Lions and leopards prowled on the lawn of the farmhouse. Hyenas made love there. When a child was shot by his playmate the score of native squatters came to the farm for arbitration, as the father of the dead boy must be indemnified in sheep. Queer, twisted Europeans sought the farm as refuge, the lonely hunters, the dreamy criminals, Old Knudsen, the charcoal burner, who thought to lift from the bottom of the lake the guano that had been deposited there since the beginning of the world. And Lulu, the gazelle, came for a while to dance.

Isak Dinesen's particular art is that of expanding a small story exquisitely, so that each detail of it shines through her

splendid prose and none is needless. Her cook, Kamante, in less certain hands, would be just a waif whom she had healed, but he is individual as she tells of him, "full of sweetness and fire." Lulu, to a lesser eye, would be a simple pet and not the rare thinking creature she describes.

The farm failed her in the end. It died with the great King Kinanjui and her friend Denys whom lions mourned. Her natives were uprooted, losing more than their land—their very identity. The tale of increasing tragedy which fills the latter half of the book seems not quite so successful as her earlier chapters, for it tapers with her hope as she discloses it, and the minute essays "From an Immigrant's Notebook" are not of equal force. But her book has a solid core of beauty in it, and a style as cadenced, constrained, and graceful as we have today. It is deservedly a Book-of-the-Month Club selection for March.

Ice Ballet

By SARA VAN ALSTYNE ALLEN

THE ice burns like a moon on fire.
The ladies of the ballet come,
Each gliding on a single skate,
Their balance perfect and precise
Upon the glitter of the ice,
As though they dared the upper air
Upon a hidden silver wire.
And now they turn, and turning, show
White boots and tinsel, skirts like snow,
Like flower petals blowing wide
And tossed upon a frozen tide.
The skates like stars in rhythm glide,
And where they pass a frost-wreath lies.
There is no music but the quick
Sure stroke of steel on living ice,
A sound like arrows in the night,
A sound like winter dreams in flight!

How to Be a Dictator

I KNOW THESE DICTATORS. By G. Ward Price. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

TO those who have been somewhat puzzled by recent events in London—probably a large majority of Americans—this book is warmly recommended. Although written before the resignation of the popular Foreign Minister, it makes clear, by implication at least, many of the issues dividing the cabinet. As foreign correspondent for the *Rothermere* newspapers, Mr. Price has long represented that portion of British opinion most favorable to Italy and Germany and most anxious for the rapprochement which Mr. Chamberlain is now seeking. Willing to accept fascism and national socialism as legitimate nationalist movements and as strong bulwarks against communism, this journalist expresses in somewhat exaggerated form the point of view which motivates the victorious enemies of Mr. Eden. Whether these Conservatives are actually jeopardizing their own interests by opposing both the Soviet Union and the League of Nations, as Sir Norman Angell suggested in his recently published "Defense of the Empire," remains to be seen. Their attitudes and objectives, now in the ascendant, are here presented in a book which combines intimate glimpses of Mussolini and Hitler, an informal style with systematic disregard of all the formal rules of paragraphing, interesting photographs, and the influential opinions of Viscount Rothermere.

It would be difficult to imagine a more laudatory biography of either Mussolini or Hitler than Mr. Price has provided, based upon his personal acquaintance with both men. In contrast to the charges ranging from Machiavellianism to lunacy which characterize most descriptions, this volume portrays the dictators as warm-hearted heroes who have rescued their respective countries from the horrors of bolshevism. While avoiding the cliché that the fruits of dictatorship are prompt trains, Mr. Price reports favorably on the new highways and other public works, the physical development of the younger generation, and the growth of national self-respect. He insists that both statesmen desire peace, but not at the price of communism; post-war history, particularly the Spanish conflict, is analyzed entirely in these terms. Defeat of "the Reds" is made the justification of many episodes which have aroused the wrath of less enthusiastic observers. Both the Matteotti murder and the Reichstag fire receive a liberal dash of whitewash, and the conquest of Ethiopia and the Jewish persecutions are applauded.

Whatever the outcome of these dic-

tatorships, it is obvious that the dictators themselves are extraordinary individuals, endowed with unusual capacities for leadership and profoundly affecting human history. Arising from humble origins, fighting for unpopular causes, brooding in prisons, and finally mastering all obstacles, Mussolini and Hitler make a Horatio Alger hero seem a lugubrious failure by comparison. Although Hitler is described as essentially a visionary and Mussolini a man of action, they have many important and minor qualities in common: concentration, perseverance, physical stamina and courage, retentive memory, abstemious habits, simple tastes, love of music, and fondness for children. If Mr. Dale Carnegie should write a volume entitled, "How to Become a Dictator," he would find excellent source material in this spirited account of two contemporary successes in the field.

James Frederick Green is a member of the staff of the Foreign Policy Association.

Philadelphia Memoirs

LANTERN SLIDES. By Mary Cadwalader Jones. Privately printed (The Merry-mount Press.) 1937.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

ALTHOUGH this little book is not issued for general circulation it richly deserves a notice in *The Saturday Review*. Mrs. Jones was a sister-in-law of Edith Wharton. While not a professional writer herself, she grew up in a world that knew good writing and has practised it in this little volume. It is, unfortunately, only the beginning of what would have been a rich autobiography, for her death intervened before the story had gone beyond the 1870 period. However, what she wrote, and particularly what she says by way of description of the opulent, cultivated, easy-going Philadelphia of the pre-Civil War period, is of great interest and real value to social history. She knew everybody in the professional groups and saw much more than a young girl usually sees, for after her mother's death she became a companion and sometimes secretary to her father. She was in Charleston before the fall of Richmond and describes the condition of that unhappy city at its lowest moment. She knew not only all Philadelphia society but the celebrities who moved through Philadelphia, and when she went abroad she went under the best auspices for the preparation of an autobiography. The description of Havana is charming. But those who read this little book should do so for its intimate picture of the way well-to-do civilized Americans lived in a community which was neither intellectual New England, commercial New York, nor the plantation south. It should go in all bibliographies of books about Philadelphia.

The Portrait of a Caste

HELEN'S TOWER. By Harold Nicolson. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. 1938. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

THIS book—a memoir of Frederick, fifth Baron Dufferin and first Marquis of Dufferin and Ava—is at once "a study in transitions" and the author's personal tribute to his "Uncle Dufferin." The biographical sequence is delayed and, in one sense, defined by a series of autobiographical passages. These passages contain Mr. Nicolson's childhood memories of his proconsular uncle by marriage, and they are written with that lucid charm which this author so fortunately possesses, and with a rare, always rare, combination of reverence, affection, humor, and perspicacity. They might easily have been exiled in a foreword; but, if they had been, the real purpose of the book—if I understand it rightly—would not have been achieved.

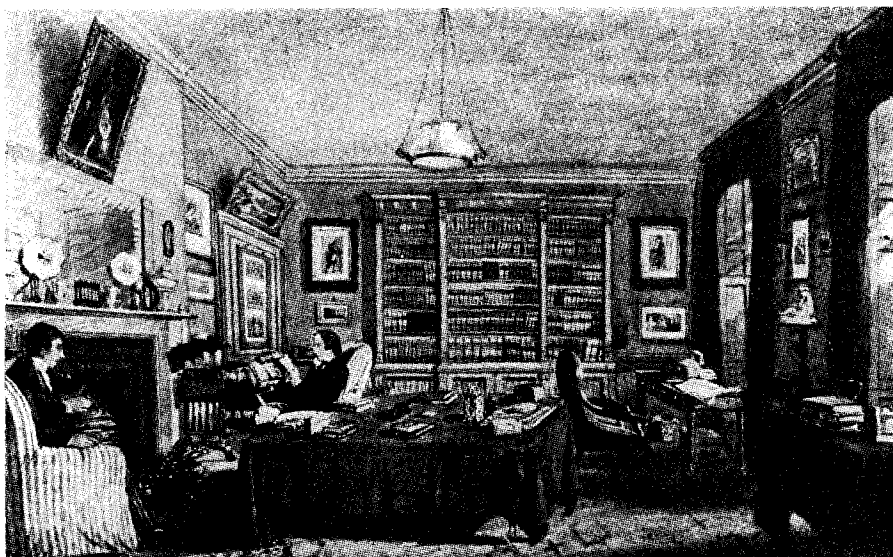
But, before attempting to discuss that purpose, I think that something should be said about Mr. Nicolson's somewhat obscurantist phrase, "a study in transitions." In the early life of Lord Dufferin the transitions were purely personal. A handsome, witty, and courteous Whig, he came to maturity in those serene and singular years between the final Chartist collapse and the Crimean War, years when Land and Industry reached a momentary truce, and young noblemen could be carefree as never before or after. Once he had come down from Oxford, where he had been something of an ascetic, Lord Dufferin scarcely needed to ask in order to receive. A shower of privileges—an English peerage, or a glimpse of warfare, or a tow from an imperial yacht—cascaded into his lap because he was titled and wealthy.

Then there followed those searchings

of the heart when the Whig in Lord Dufferin shivered on the stark threshold of Liberalism . . . and drew back. He "was not by temperament attuned to the industrial revolution"; nor, in spite of his humanity, and because of his inherited prejudices, could he stomach the more indigestible portions of Mr. Gladstone's policy.

It was not surprising that Lord Dufferin, with his odd, un-English mixture of romanticism and hard-headedness, with his alien charm, his deep sense of religion, his extreme personal integrity, should have been steered away from English politics and towards diplomacy. Why not? He was ambitious, so he said. He ardently desired not to be a failure. And when that transition occurred—which Mr. Nicolson specifically places between the years '50 and '60—from oligarchy to plutocracy, the field for a diplomatist was noticeably increased. And a great diplomatist Lord Dufferin became: his career, once started, moved splendidly upwards. Governor-General of Canada, Ambassador to Russia and to Turkey, Viceroy of India, Ambassador to Italy and to France.

But underneath all this there lay another transition at which Mr. Nicolson does not even hint. And that was the transition whereby the oligarch became the unwitting servant of the plutocrat: a transition of which Lord Dufferin's career affords a notable example. This transition contains one of the most fascinating and profound stories of the English nineteenth century; and though, perhaps, it could not be documented without dullness—if at all—it could certainly be outlined. Yet even when Lord Dufferin, an old and innocent victim, is caught in the toils of finance, it does not occur to Mr. Nicolson to point out an obvious but inescapable irony. For his



LORD DUFFERIN IN HIS ROOMS AT OXFORD, WITH THE EARL OF GLASGOW.