



Edward Lear: from a drawing by William Holman Hunt, 1857.

without critical value. Nor is it without sprightliness. The reader is continually coming upon amusing and unsuspected data. He learns, for example, that Lear's grandfather was a Dane and spelled his name "Lor" with a line through and two dots over the o, and that the equivalent in Greek means nothing more nor less than "nonsense." The academe may be surprised to discover that Queen Victoria engaged Lear as her drawing-teacher, and the admirer of Lear's superbly comic Thurberesque drawings will certainly be astounded to find out that, after studying with Holman Hunt, Lear considered himself one of the Pre-Raphaelites. Those who remember the author of "The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo" as the inventor of absurd words will scarcely recognize him as the lithographer of "Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae," a work which brought favorable comparisons with Audubon.

But the book is more than a set of revaluations. It is a broadly human document. Lear's indescribable charm is here, his curious bachelor-dom which combined a love of children with a fear of women, his success as an amateur composer and singer—when he sang his setting of Tennyson's "Home they brought her warrior dead," his audience told him he deserved half the Laureateship—his most revealing letters, and records of his travels which unconsciously betray the parochial puritan.

Mr. Davidson's biography has the final virtue of implication. He makes us realize that the two great English masters of nonsense were also masters of cadence, and that the maddest verbal music was perfected by a topographical landscape-painter and his successor who, when not disguised as Lewis Carroll, was a university lecturer, a precise mathematician, and a deacon in holy orders.

Our Air Defenses

BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR: *The Influence of Air Power on International Relations.* By Major George Fielding Eliot. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1939. 173 pp., with index. \$1.75.

Reviewed by MAJOR JOHN H. BURNS

MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT, who by past writings appears to be able to make military matters plain to the American people—a most difficult task—deals with the question of air power with marked success. His first chapter on some fundamentals of war could be read by anyone with great profit, even some soldiers, judging by their writings.

However, one cannot agree with his statement that there are but three revolutionary military inventions: discipline, gunpowder, and the airplane. There are many such inventions—the bow, the sword, bronze, iron, armor, and the like. Furthermore, what occurred after gunpowder was discovered was not due to gunpowder, but to the rise of the soldier, who had been dead for a thousand years. He took the place of the medieval warrior. However, such remarks are in a sense captious, for Major Eliot, stepping into the field of military aviation, shows a clear grasp of his subject. He steers clear of the Douhet fanatics who consider air power everything, and wide of the crusty soldier who believes airplanes are only slightly valuable and in general a damned nuisance.

His analysis of the European aerial situation seems sound. He shows starkly why the Munich agreement was signed. As he sees it:

It is not therefore to be wondered at that there was fear in London during the suspense period of the Munich crisis. . . . That is not to say, by any means, that the British people would not have supported their government had resistance to German demands been decided on last autumn, or will not if in some future crisis a like determination shall be taken. What is contended is simply that they did not *force* the government to take a firmer stand, that Hitler could in fact pretty well count on there being no immediate public reaction against the government's surrender; and that the fear of being bombed had a great deal to do with this quiescence.

What happens when cities are deluged with bombs? Will the civilian morale crack? Who can tell? Judging from Barcelona, Major Eliot feels there is a definite chance that it will. Furthermore, the present dictator powers have a certain supremacy, and considering the potential destructiveness of their air power, can and do promote their policies by "blackmail."

How correct Major Eliot's table of European air strengths may be, no one can say. Such things are not being offered for publication.

Turning to the American situation, he shows how two oceans guard us, how difficult it is to reach us, and yet what approaches we must protect, and the air fleet we must have. He indicates how the Caribbean must be covered—which is quietly being done, by the way—and how the islands of the Atlantic and Pacific coast must be woven into a protective aerial barrier. The structure he outlines is clear and appears vitally necessary, even though there be some arguments about the details of the plan. Strangely enough, he indicates that dominating sea power will ultimately pass to this country, and shows how the land aviation must be woven into our sea defense.

One may disagree with certain of his conclusions, but it appears that in general he has pointed out with clarity what we must do in the future to be safe. Air power is one growing factor whose place and might is hard to judge. Major Eliot in this short book has made a start.

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"Mankind of Insects"

OF ANTS AND MEN. By Caryl P. Haskins. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1939. 244 pp. with index. \$2.75.

Reviewed by DONALD CULROSS PEATTIE

IF any one living can possibly write a better popular book than this on the polity and perversions, the instincts and nascent intelligences of the ant heap, let him dip his pen forthwith, for, to my taste, there can never be too many good books about "the mankind of insects." Solomon and Aristotle gazed on the ant heap from the heights of their respective and proverbial wisdoms, and marveled. William Morton Wheeler, my old entomology teacher, was among the wit-tiest as well as the profoundest of writers on ants. Maeterlinck, no scientist admittedly, turned out an absorbing little volume on them.

Dr. Haskins has upheld the tradition. He has collected ants all over North America, and in the tropics of America, Asia, and Africa. He has more than a hundred nests under close scrutiny all the time. If any one should know about ants, it is he. He shows the immense range of pismire cultures, from nomadism to the pastoral stage, and on through the harvester stage and the intensive agricultural stage, to increasingly effete levels of slave-holding (to which the slaves make a strikingly masochist

response), and finally the most fantastic parasitism. Ant wars, ant fascism and communism, ant instinct, and even ant intelligence are in the field of his bold and easy discourse. It is a volume which I found myself compelled to read to the last page without a stop.

I am not sure how far orthodox sociology would support Dr. Haskins when he moralizes from the ant heap to the human mess, and back again. I'm told that it's thinking back with Herbert Spencer to speak categorically of men in the hunting stage, the pastoral stage, etc., and that sociology has been scrambling night and day to get as far from Spencer as possible. And I'm not sure, either, that political economists will accept his notions of fascism, communism, and democracy, as he employs the terms. Just possibly Dr. Haskins, like myself, sees one form of government and way of life as white, and others as black, while the realists tell us they are uniformly dingy.

But we shall all be interested in the implications behind his comparison of emmet and human polity. He finds that the American type of democracy represents a fairly youthful, because individualistic and unsocialized, stage of civil development, corresponding with some of the more primitive ant societies. To judge by the analogy of the formic host, however, it is fascism and communism which represent mature stages of social development (using "mature" as meaning "far gone"). Beyond this mature stage wait levels of social senescence in the way of slaveholding which we only approached for a few glamorous moments in Stark Young's *Mississippi* of 1860. When we get as far along as some of the ants we shall be too high-born and enervated even to feed our-

selves, and will starve in the midst of plenty unless our slaves (our machines?) put comfits in our mouths. As for human militarism, if it follows the lines of formic militarism, we shall, after a highly martial and predatory period, have imposing-looking but atrophied weapons that we either cannot or will not use. Perhaps, it occurs to me, we shall all follow the lead of a certain statesman born ahead of his time, and flourish umbrellas instead of cutlasses.

The Making of Virginia

GAMBLE'S HUNDRED. By Clifford Dowdey. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1939. 367 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

IN "Gamble's Hundred," Mr. Clifford Dowdey has taken an interesting and, on the whole, rather neglected period in Virginia history and based upon it a sound and substantial novel. We all know about John Smith and we all know about Robert E. Lee, but in between—well, there was Bacon's Rebellion, of course, and the Revolution, and Jefferson—but, in spite of those names and facts, our knowledge is somewhat sketchy. And, if we were asked to say what changed the Virginia of the Virginia Company to the Virginia of the Civil War, I'm afraid our answers would be a trifle vague. But here, Mr. Dowdey has done a very interesting thing. He has taken the colony of the 1730s, the colony still in flux, with the ruling class yet in the making, and still, in many cases, on the make, and shown it as it was—together with the continual and irrepressible conflict between great and small, between tide-water and back-country, that runs through Virginia's history. And, so doing, he has done as accurate and admirable a job of surveying as his own hero, Christopher Ballard.

I feel that I am talking of the book in terms of history rather than in terms of fiction, and that is, perhaps, unfair. Mr. Dowdey tells a good story—his hero, Christopher Ballard, is one of those able technicians that the rich and well-born have to use, in any age. And, like many another technician, before and since, Christopher falls in love with splendor



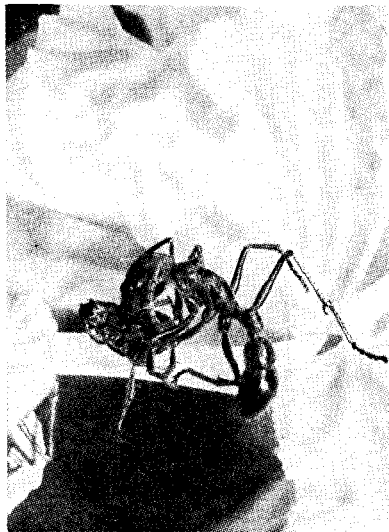
Marshall Beauchamp

Clifford Dowdey "has done an accurate job of surveying" . . .

like the Kirbys, who knew, vaguely, that something was happening to them but did not know why it happened. All the roots of the South are here, and the problem is still valid for our own time. Except that, in the 1730s, Christopher Ballard and his girl could still go over the mountains and strike for the free and dangerous land. They cannot do that any more.

A stimulating novel, with sharply drawn contrasts of character, "Gamble's Hundred" is better unified than "Bugles Blow No More" and more swiftly written. The frail and lovely Evelyn Frane remains a symbol rather than a person, but both Christopher Ballard and Sidney Frane are alive. Indeed, the latter almost runs away with the book, as villains are apt to do. He is an entirely convincing character—the Man of Property in his own time as Soames Forsyte was in his. And, if he lacks the bite of Soames Forsyte—well, that is a question of writing. Mr. Dowdey writes well and unobtrusively—but his honesty of approach and his selection of material are still the most important things in his work. You wish, at times, that he would let himself go a little more—the defense of the Bastion of St. Gervais is, no doubt, entirely impossible history, but no one has ever read it and forgotten it. All the same, this is a well-built and admirable novel in the modern tradition. It will tell you something about the makings of America that most of us don't know or have forgotten—and give you a gripping and convincing story of human beings into the bargain.

Stephen Vincent Benét is the author of "John Brown's Body."



D. M. Gallagher

The kill: ant with cockroach, caught in an orchid petal.

and a girl who embodies splendor, only to revolt against them both at last. It is a good story, and the narrative moves swiftly and surely to its conclusion. But what is most fascinating in the book is neither hero nor heroine, but Virginia itself—the growing colony, with its sharp contrasts of gay wealth and independent poverty—the big landowners crowding out the small planters—the men like Sidney Frane, resolved to be masters of Virginia by fair means or foul, and the families