

The Granite That Is Churchill

BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS. By Winston S. Churchill. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1941. 462 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by RAYMOND LESLIE BUELL

IT is hazardous to assess the historic position of any public figure while he is still alive. The danger is reduced, however, in the case of Mr. Churchill. If British democracy wins this war, Winston Churchill will rank with Abraham Lincoln in the annals of freedom. If Britain goes down, it will be because the people of England did not heed Churchill until too late.

In an era when mass opinion controls the actions of every government, whether democratic or dictatorial, public leaders must not only be men of action; they must also be men of words. They must know how to evoke responses from the masses. The test of a great democratic leader is whether he can do this without resorting to the false demagoguery of the totalitarians. Judged by this test, Mr. Churchill in this volume of speeches proves his greatness. For he is master both of the spoken and written word. Randolph Churchill, his son, who edited these speeches, does not tell us how they are prepared. If written out before delivered they would be remarkable enough; if spoken extemporaneously they would be more remarkable still.

There are two reasons why Mr. Churchill probably will go down in history as the greatest statesman of the present era. The first is that before coming to power he was a lonely prophet who, without fear of the consequences, repeatedly challenged the ghastly self-complacency and blindness of the British governing class and, indeed, British public opinion during the past twenty years. Secondly, and of even more importance, he has shown truly great capacity in rallying the people of England to supreme effort in an hour of unprecedented peril.

The speeches in this volume go back to May, 1938, more than a year before the outbreak of the present war. They begin with a protest against the surrender of the three Irish bases. Mr. Churchill foresaw that without the use of these bases the British Navy would have great difficulty in resisting a German blockade in time of war. In address after address, Mr. Churchill also criticized his own Party for its failure adequately to rearm Britain or create a Ministry of Supply. Although a belated convert to collective security (as well as to Anglo-American friendship), he repeatedly urged in this period the revival of the League of Nations, the

creation of a Democratic Coalition against aggressors, and friendship with Russia despite his dislike for its internal regime. One of the earliest opponents of appeasement, Churchill denounced the Munich settlement as "a disaster of the first magnitude." He unerringly predicted that it would soon be followed by the complete destruction of Czechoslovakia.

If Churchill is one of the few public figures who correctly analyzed the nature of the present world crisis, he demonstrated his superb leadership only after becoming Prime Minister following the German break-through in the West last May. His first success was in forming a Coalition Government, combining trade unionists with conservatives. He accompanied this concrete achievement by a series of stirring messages to the British public telling them the truth and preparing them for the worst. But instead of creating a sense of despair and defeatism, he aroused a sense of unity and a determination for sacrifice and heroism without precedent in modern history.

In an era marked by the revolt of the masses, it is rather remarkable that England should turn to one of its unconventional Conservatives in an hour of great peril. Mr. Churchill has

never shared the uncritical pacifist faith of modern liberalism. He distrusts utopias; and he has an old-fashioned sense of sin. His strength today lies in the very fact that he does embody British tradition. A member of one of England's oldest families of whom the Duke of Marlborough was previously the most distinguished member, Churchill is the embodiment of the history of England. He is one of England's most accomplished writers and historians—the author of a dozen or more books; but to the British public he has revived the memories of Trafalgar even more through his personality and character than through his intellect.

Churchill no doubt has the defects of his virtues. His very mastery of the field of strategy and military history makes it difficult for him to delegate authority, particularly in these fields. So far, moreover, he has failed to show adequate leadership on the economic front—England still lacks a satisfactory wage and price policy. Nevertheless, Churchill stands for the British method of solving problems one at a time by trial and error. British moral tenacity in the long run should overcome defects in expert knowledge.

Although the Prime Minister declines to make any formal statement of peace aims, these speeches reveal an understanding of the nature of the present struggle and of the type of society, national and international, which must be created if freedom is to survive. Churchill is prepared to remove the legitimate grievances of aggressor nations but only after they have abandoned their militarism. Likewise, Churchill is not oblivious to the needs of the humble people. Even before war came he declared, "We see great hopes for the future of all the world. We see the opportunity of lifting, through the aid of science, all the men in all the lands to a far higher level of well-being and culture than was ever possible before. It is an opportunity which has never come to mankind before. . . . There is no more far reaching investment for a nation than to put milk, food and education into young children." Under Mr. Churchill's leadership a new conservatism may arise in England, as well as in America, which will find an answer to the dual scourges of unemployment and war, but which will base reforms upon traditional foundations and the moral values of the past. If such a conservative rebound takes place, Mr. Churchill's position will be far greater in history than that of a success leader in a second World War.

A Secretarial View

I WAS WINSTON CHURCHILL'S SECRETARY. By Phyllis Moir. New York: Wilfred Funk Inc. 1941. \$1.75.

Reviewed by CECIL ROBERTS

MR. CHURCHILL is now the glamour boy; all is forgiven; those wild political adventures, that albatross of the Dardanelles around that plethoric neck, the monstrously insistent role of Cassandra, the pin-pricking of the Baldwin balloon, the downpour of scorn through the holes of the Chamberlain umbrella. Today, the man of the hour, defiant and unquenchable in all his greatness, he lacks no chorus.

I was afraid Miss Moir's book was one more contribution to the pyre of incense. It is all that, but it is much more. There is so much, those of us who know and admire this man, could say with engaging indiscretion. He is the stuff of which legends are made. He is not only a colossus of brain and physical courage, he can be a momentary apparition of rudeness, truculence, and inconsiderate impetuosity.

(Continued on page 19)

Fisher . . .

CITY OF ILLUSION. By Vardis Fisher. New York: Harper & Bros. 1941. 382 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWIN L. SABIN

MR. FISHER'S novel summons the resurrection, in the flesh, of Virginia City, that one-time pretentious and profligate mining-camp of the great Comstock silver lode in western Nevada. Taken by and large, sizable western mining-camps have much the same aspects of a community in ferment; but Virginia City, nurtured by the greedy "silver rush" from the California towns and diggings across the near Sierra, within a few months at the beginning of the Sixties was dominated by a foot-loose horde ripe for the wildest extravagances.

The story opens with the tentative first discoveries. Thenceforth, unreservedly told as it is, it might still have been but another recountal, in fiction, of bizarre mining-camp characters and events, had not Mr. Fisher built it around the Scotch woman, early a miners' boarding-housekeeper, who in the annals of the day was Eilley Orrum, twice married before she starred as Mrs. Sandy Bowers, ambitious, with her sudden wealth, to be the community up-lifter and "Queen of the Comstock."

Probably no other camp in the West has been so exploited in fact and fancy as Virginia City. With the immense amount of anecdotal material at hand, the story seems occasionally forced into a sight-seeing tour by which all doors are flung wide to the reader. And whether story strength is gained by lavish printing of the obscene and accepted unspeakable some readers, who may regard their minds as their castles, may question. The governing interest, however, curiosity aside, maintains in the actions and reactions of this sturdy, shrewd, simple, at times pathetic woman, of a community of miners, gamblers, killers, bums, saloon-keepers, dancehall-keepers, speculators, strumpets, and courtesans, with a leaven of the merely eccentric.

Assured by her gift of second-sight that she has a fortune in silver, Eilley adopts the runty teamster and prospector, Lemuel Sanford Bowers, by marrying him. He appeals with a certain humble morality and she needs a male. Her two previous marriages had failed of children, and she has hopes of Mr. Bowers, who can more-over manage their silver properties. Viewed through the Virginia City magnifying glass Mr. Bowers, to her, is a financial genius.

The \$10,000 a week income from her ten-foot claim taken in payment of a board-bill, and from the abutting ten-foot claim of Sandy, brings the responsibilities of European travel, home-town improvement, a "Bowers Mansion"—constructed and furnished at a cost of \$407,000, as the record runs. The irksome magnificence drives Sandy to his old-days shack and habits, but her confidence in his abilities persists. She has proof of his loyalty to her when after his death she finds, among his treasured possessions, his first and only tooth-brush, her gift to him.

Virginia City was uninspired by her ideals, save as it ridiculed her or



Vardis Fisher



Kaiden Kazanjian
Robert Nathan

preyed upon her. As young Steve Gilpin of the *Enterprise* advised her, Virginia City wished no "culture," it wished to be itself. And at the last she saw the half-breed girl, Nita, turned harlot, playing the triumphant lady over her who had thought to be a lady. Bankrupt she was, by the mysterious carelessness of Mr. Bowers, and the pressure of the San Francisco mining operators. She has become the "Seeress of the Washoe," believing in the superior destiny of herself and her Virginia City to the end of those illusions upon which she and many another had fed.

Nathan . . .

THEY WENT ON TOGETHER. By Robert Nathan. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1941. 191 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

MR. NATHAN may truly say with the French author that, though his glass may be small, he drinks out of his glass. A novel from his hand is as unmistakably by him as a Chopin composition is unmistakably by Chopin. Indeed, the comparison runs deeper than the mere matter of individuality—there is in both artists, otherwise so different, the same approach to their imaginative problems, the same pleasure in solving that problem in small space and with economy of means, the same elegance, and the same Sarmation melancholy. For Mr. Nathan, who was originally an aristocratic and occasionally an acrid satirist, has abandoned satire in his later books, including "They Went on Together," substituting for it an almost equally aristocratic sentimentalism, an aristocratic pity. "The Bishop's Wife" was an amused comment on human foibles. "They Went on Together," is no longer merely amused, no longer merely about human foibles, and no longer merely a comment. It is Mr. Nathan's small contribution to the growing literature of admiration about the Little Man.

The substance of "They Went on Together" is of the simplest. The enemy planes invade a country that sometimes seems to be France and sometimes seems to be the United States, and the small and very American boy, Paul, his tinier sister Marie Rose, and their mother are compelled to flee before the bombers, pushing their few provisions before them in a perambulator. A lost but sturdy girl named Sylvie joins the party, and the two older children suffer the experiences which, alas! too many children in Europe, Asia, and Africa have endured. The emotional responses of the children are the emotional responses of any American boy and girl, and in their inarticulateness Mr. Nathan finds opportunity for that mingling of sentiment and pathos which has replaced satire in his fiction.

Mr. Nathan has been known as the creator of satiric fantasy; and it is interesting to see the formula suffer a sea change in his later books. I have said that this novel is a contribution to the literature of praise for the Little Man. That is to say Mr. Nathan makes the Little Man even smaller, by the simple device of reducing him to

(Continued on page 12)