

# While the Bombs Dropped

WHERE STANDS A WINGED SENTRY. By Margaret Kennedy. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1941. 251 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THIS honest bread-and-butter book, without frills, without dramatics, without a single excursion into adventure, tells how a British family faced up to the dark realities of the war during the anxious summer of 1940; and how the people about them, first in Surrey and later in a coastal town full of evacuees, accepted the grim necessities of the hour. When the diary-record begins, France is slowly crumpling to her knees, and the British people are realizing with horror—but without panic—that they will soon stand alone against the Nazi machine. When the chronicle ends, the first heavy German daylight attacks upon London have just been repelled. Margaret Kennedy does not don a uniform, run an ambulance, or even fight incendiary bombs; she interviews no dignitaries, and witnesses no more thrilling sight than the flight of a squadron of the R.A.F. Nor does she tell much of the changes produced in British daily life by the Nazi smash. What she does do extremely well is to tell what she and her neighbors were thinking.

When Pearl, the alley-cat servant girl from a slum home, heard that Hitler said he would be in London by August 15, she burst out in scorn: "Eh! The cheeky monkey!" But for a time in May and June a great many Britons were deeply worried. Margaret Kennedy herself asked a friend: "Should we have a chance of winning if the French went out?" That was when the Home Guard, or rather the men who later went into the Guard, were armed with "George Pike's rook rifle" and some clubs. She made ready for invasion—money, boots, knapsacks, an iron ration to carry. But when the trains laden with men from Dunkerque came through Surrey on the way to London, the British began to catch their self-confidence again.

At the town on the West Coast the spirit was high. One lady said: "The news lately has been rather queer, hasn't it?" That was as far as anybody would go. It is not strange that Margaret Kennedy, who is half Irish, describes the British character as fundamentally imperturbable, or as she puts it, unimpressible. Nothing startles or changes the British very much. "We seem so incapable of any kind of impression that we appear fabulously stupid. And then we don't always behave so stupidly, so people

think we must be hypocrites and insincere." But back of the British stolidity and seeming stupidity, the aloofness and impenetrability, is a sense of abiding ideals. "It is this deep unconscious sway of spiritual values which makes our people stalwart and strongly conscious of their dignity as human beings. It animates our funny old institutions, and makes them something alive, and, when geared to battle, terribly tenacious and formidable."

This is not an important book; it does not pretend to be. Much of it is very trivial. None of it is exciting. But it is human; in a few places it is moving, and in more than a few it shows genuine insight.



Margaret Kennedy

## The Girl Grew Bolder

THE GOLDEN VIOLET. By Joseph Shearing. New York: Smith & Durell. 1941. 321 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by PHIL STONE

SHEARING is, to this reviewer's mind, the best serious writer of high romance now publishing, and this book is quite as good as, if not a shade better than, "The Crime of Laura Sarelle," "Aunt Beardie," "The Spider in the Cup," and "Blanche Fury." The author does everything well—distinct and creditable characters, vivid incident, suspense as good as Stevenson's, and if the backgrounds incline to the exotic, so did Stevenson's.

The central and changing character in "The Golden Violet" is a gooey female serialist of the English 1840's, famous under the name of Angel (for Angelica) Crowley. Reared under the influence of a pious mother and a cross-grained aunt, Angel has become the Pollyanna of her time with such titles as "Clara Martin, or The Erring Daughter," "The Crown of Virtue."

Angel is 27; so when the solid but slightly sinister Mr. Thicknesse offers her a large estate in England and a plantation in Jamaica to ameliorate his widows'hip, Angel knows that the hero of her novels—the same in all of them—has definitely missed the boat, and she accepts, with some qualms.

The qualms are quite justified. The estate is mortgaged to the hilt and the plantation needs thousands of pounds to make it run; Mr. Thicknesse had discovered that Angel had £10,000 in the Fund and was regularly earning £1,000 or so more a year. Since Angel believes in her own nonsense she meekly turns over everything she has to Mr. Thicknesse.

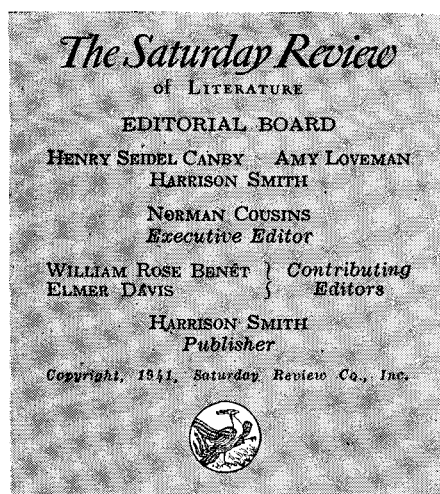
The girl is so ineffably silly at the

beginning of the book that she takes these blows with only a little toughening and returns for more. The next one is that her husband never has any intention of occupying the conjugal bed. It later proves that Thicknesse thinks Angel homely and he is already well satisfied with a beautiful quadroon slave on the plantation.

Blow after blow toughens "Mary" and beats a little sense into her head, but the principal part of the story, set in Jamaica, deals with the events that make an intelligent, attractive, and resourceful woman of the inane girl spinster. The climax is where she discovers the real hero, a substantial one, instead of the one she had written. It would not be fair to tell the drastic difference between the real hero and the fictional one, which brings about the final highly dramatic struggle between the old Angel and the "becoming" one.

The Slave Rebellion, the death of the hero, and the revenge of which the new Angel is capable, with a sardonic postlude, complete the book. The difficulty in reviewing Shearing's books is that if one shows the audience where the rabbits are, the trick is no good—which is not a very dignified figure to use in connection with a story that does not rest on tricks at all, but on solid logical development.

The title comes from the silly serial Angel is completing as the book starts and whose final chapter she finds it increasingly difficult to write as the book proceeds. Not content with having taken the equivalent of more than one hundred thousand dollars in modern values from the girl, Thicknesse blusters at her for not working more rapidly to get more money for him. This author can be cruel, with a character or with a scene.



## WAR AND LITERATURE

THE war in which a great part of the world is now actively or sporadically engaged began in August, 1914. The first phase ended in 1918 after devastating part of Europe and killing twenty millions of people. The peace that followed led to starvation and economic breakdown. It was like the exhaustion that follows a severe attack of tropical fever. In this case, the war disease broke out again in Asia after little more than a decade of intermission and has raged intermittently ever since.

If war is to be cured before the fruits of man's labors and hopes for centuries have perished, it must be understood—not only by the scientist but by man himself. Though we know and have catalogued a thousand causes, we do not even know the germ that lies at the root of war. Is war a universal trait of all mankind, part of man's mind—a vestigial though dangerous structure apt to flare up suddenly, like an appendix? Are there carriers of war who appear to be normal until the plague springs from them; and is the cure, then, their eradication or confinement by other masses of men not similarly infected? Is the building of a new and sanitary world order in which all can live in peace the answer, and is that cure possible while war is alive, or while peoples are exhausted in the periods of apathy that follow war?

The time to study war is while it rages, while the minds of millions of men are awake to its terrors and its fascinations. After the peace treaties are signed, people are busy remaking torn lives, or plunging into revolution and further chaos, ultimately succumbing to lethargy and exhaustion, or, if they belong to the conquering nations, to the hope that the machinery for peace will end the menace forever.

In a land where the press is free, the best way to study and analyze the

war malady is through the literature that war produces. For a year or more after war's outbreak, the thoughts of even the most intelligent reader are obscured by his personal need to satisfy his own intense curiosity, to justify the war to himself, to decide that one side is right and the other wrong, or to be convinced that his own country must engage in it.

After two years as a spectator, the average American has reached this point: his curiosity about what this new mechanized warfare is like is satisfied, if not satiated. He has seen the Nazi panzer divisions crush one European country after the other; he has seen cities destroyed; buildings, sacred with the weight of centuries, converted into rubble; men, women, and children killed. American writers and correspondents have shown him Finns dying in the sub-Arctic in defense of their homeland; Englishmen and women huddled in the shelters of London, Coventry, and Plymouth while death rode the sky; Belgian and French refugees killed on the crowded roads to the South; heroic Greek troops mowed down with their British comrades on the slopes of Mount Olympus; men dying on the burning sands of Africa, and drowned in the freezing North Atlantic.

Yes; Americans now know the present manifestation of the disease for what it is. From the Spanish revolution to today there now exists an extensive literature on the aims and methods of the axis countries for the control and domination of Europe and a large part of Asia, and even of the rest of the world. The books pouring

from the presses of American publishers have convinced our people of two facts: that war today is more terrible and more destructive than it has ever been; that the nations that have upset the uneasy peace in which we lived must be stopped.

In these two years, the first phase of America's education has been completed. But the great task remains. We now know war for what it is, but we must somehow make up our minds as to the kind of peace that must follow it. And if we fail in making a just peace, leaving large sections of the world starving and without hope, then that brutal peace will have to be implemented with arms so that it may endure as long as possible. However small or great a part America takes in the actual conflict, it is apparent that as the only great country whose vitality and resources will be almost unimpaired, it must have an immense share in the burden of restoring the world to a condition where men, at least for a time, can live without war.

To emerge from this war without hatred, to bind up the world's wounds and to start again the wheels of commerce and normal life in countries paralyzed by war, despair, and revolution will take resolution and knowledge. The knowledge will be found by the ordinary man in the books that will be published in the next two or three years. It is too much to ask of any citizen that he read even half of them. But the best of them he should read and digest. We must have a public educated for peace when at long last the guns have been put down

H. S.

## Sonnet

By Jesse Stuart

SWEET on, you wind, upon upheaved earth.  
Batter the sides of hills with snow and rain.  
Sweep on from your uncertain birth till death.  
Batter this earth, do it again, again!  
For what to you is any thunder clap,  
And what to you is any lightning whip?  
And what is horseweed blood and greentree sap.  
And what to you is wild fern's sweet rain drip?  
Sweep on, eternal wind, sweep down on me,  
As you would any berry briar now sleeping.  
Sweep down on me and strip me like the tree  
You stripped in autumn—only keep the strippings.  
Bury them with me in earth thunder-shaken.  
Make the world new, I pray; let me awaken!