

Post-War Life in Barsetshire

PEACE BREAKS OUT. By Angela Thirkell. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1947. 370 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

AN ARTIST wishing to paint an allegorical figure of Peace in 1947 would be hard put to it; were he to settle for the familiar dove-and-olive-branch the bird would, undoubtedly, have to be moulting, the branch bare of leaf or fruit.

The peace which breaks over Mrs. Thirkell's lovingly chronicled Barsetshire families is equally dilapidated. Just as war was for them, in the previous novels, more a question of annoyance and patient contriving than horror and privation, so peace is almost frustration—the commission nearly won, the skimping and making-do prolonged. Peace has failed to come as a great, dramatic climax; even its announcement is confused, its celebration aggravating as all the bakers are closed.

If Mrs. Thirkell's legions of admirers have worried lest a *Brave New World* alter or disturb her county families they may relax and enjoy this new story as usual. Life goes on much as before in village and close (Mrs. Thirkell is, to my knowledge, the only English novelist who has dared to draw a Bishop universally disliked), bazaars are held, tennis matches arranged, house parties achieved.

Lady Graham is quite as beautiful and brainless as ever, and, despite her five bouncing children, is surrounded (balm to all middle-aged readers) by various infatuated young men. Miss Bunting's memory is green in the hearts of her pupils and her lessons, well-learned, provide an aptness in literary quotation or recognition which apparently makes an excellent substitute for family connections.

There are no unfortunate marriages in Mrs. Thirkell's excellently managed pages. The sophisticate may toy with the idea of marrying the innocent young girl, but in the end he wisely settles for equal sophistication, the gentle young man wins an equally gentle wife, interests are matched and family trees even more so. In her deft way she achieves happy endings for three young men, all of whom have appeared before in various books: David, the eccentric Lady Emily's son (and Miss Bunting's favorite pupil), Robin Dale, who lost a foot in the war, and Martin Leslie, Lady Emily's grandson.

When problems and grim realities

confront us on every side, it is perhaps ungrateful to complain of such undemanding entertainment. Yet at the risk of seeming captious, a plea is entered for a new field for Mrs. Thirkell's delicious and penetrating talents. She has now evolved such a well-recorded circle that there are no surprises left. The non-sequitur (of which she is undoubtedly the most ingenious creator); the old lady who never gets to her feet but in a landslide of impedimenta; the innocent and beautiful young women, or the hearty and wholesome ones, still, figuratively at least, brandishing their hockey sticks; the gallant young men,

the equally gallant older ones, bungling a bit but adroitly managed by their wives; the snobberies of the servants' hall, the lower classes who may be kind, courageous, or difficult but who may never, never escape from their vulgarity—Mrs. Thirkell has drawn them all so neatly that one almost feels she is playing with stock figures from a kind of Pollock's Penny Plain and Tuppence Colored Children's Theatre. They may be manipulated into different positions but they never vary. And, too, she has developed a style which, while (deceptively) easy and confidential, has now become so involved that it verges on tea-table conversation with an elderly, delightful, but just faintly tedious aunt.

The Ageless Fight

THE GIRL AND THE FERRYMAN. By Ernst Wiechert. New York: Pilot Press, Inc. 1947. 206 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

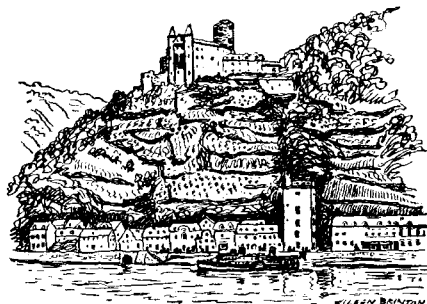
THIS novel, originally published, if my memory serves me right, in the early thirties, is a simple enough story. Jürgen Doskocil, a ferryman on an East Prussian river, has buried an unfaithful wife. For a while he carries on alone and keeps to himself, until fate delivers Marte at his doorstep. Like many of their fellow villagers, Marte and her father have come under the spell of a foreign missionary, a Mr. Maclean, who has arrived from Salt Lake City—the "Golden City"—with the promise of bliss and prosperity. Marte and her father have sold their property and are waiting for the emigrants' ship to take them overseas to that Eden. In the meantime Maclean is amusing himself with the girls of the hamlet. He fiercely resents Marte's growing attachment to Jürgen and her subsequent marriage to the hardworking, taciturn man who has withstood the lure of his mission.

And suddenly the reader, having followed what thus far seemed a simple tale of rural life in an austere, forlorn, windswept landscape, finds himself in the very midst of drama

and tragedy. The fight is on. It is not a fight between the lecherous clergyman and Jürgen, but between Maclean and the illiterate girl herself. It is a battle whose ironically happy ending Ernst Wiechert recounts with mounting tension until a great peace descends on his troubled characters. It is no other than the eternal fight between good and evil. One may dismiss the subject as an old one; it will, alas, never age. One may also dismiss Mr. Maclean as an altogether incredible villain. Like Mr. Penhallow, the vicious clergyman of Pierre Andrézel's "The Angelic Avengers," he is not an immoral, greedy felon posing as a minister; he is a minister—the passionate missionary of the creed of evil. With Hitler's full record before his eyes, who can deny that such a creed does indeed exist, as do its preachers?

Compared with their vociferous sermons, Wiechert's voice is a small one, subdued, plain, and even somewhat thin and timid at times. Yet Dr. Goebbels feared it, forbade the author's writings, and had him put into the Dachau concentration camp, despite the fact that here was a German writer of stature who also happened to be an artist after his own heart.

With a few strokes Wiechert admirably paints a winter night on the frozen river, the miracle of a young field, or the nocturnal converse of a man and a woman who love each other. Coming belatedly out of the caldron of German life and German writing, his voice is among the best that remain. Though he has done more ambitious books, Jürgen Doskocil's softly-told story will introduce his creator to American readers, and win him friends.



Case for Calculated Economy

TAXATION FOR PROSPERITY. By Randolph E. Paul. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1947. 418 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by PAUL M. O'LEARY

TAXATION is traditionally regarded as a dull, even a dismal subject, especially when treated by "experts." But Randolph Paul's book is neither dull nor dismal though Mr. Paul is definitely an expert in the subject about which he writes. His long and successful experience as a private tax lawyer and a Federal official concerned with taxes (he was general counsel of the Treasury and tax adviser to the Secretary of the Treasury during the recent war) have steeped him in an amazingly wide range of knowledge about the American federal tax system without dulling a bright and scintillating mind. He writes clearly and with verve. He has wit and irony as Beardsley Ruml will discover when he reads Chapter Thirteen on the Ruml Plan and Current Tax Payment. But he writes from a sober, serious point of view, and with a sense of real urgency, about the importance of trying to influence the course of action in the field of federal taxation during the years ahead.

"Taxation for Prosperity" is written in three parts: "Taxation in Retrospect," covering the development of the federal tax system from 1893 through 1945, "Problems of Future Tax Policy," and "A Federal Tax System for the Future." For most readers the first part, being the least technical, will have the greatest appeal. Certainly its chapters on war finance, Chapters Ten through Seventeen, pack into 125 pages an intensely interesting "inside view" of a unique and vastly important period in American history. Mr. Paul was general counsel of the Treasury during much of this period and no man, not even the Secretary himself, played a more important role in trying to get Congress to enact tax legislation adequate to the fundamental needs of the times. Much of what he writes

here is consequently "source material" for future students of the period. Naturally the Treasury and the President come off much better than the Congress in Mr. Paul's discussion of the Revenue Act of 1943. This was the act passed over President Roosevelt's stinging veto by a Congress led by "Dear Alben" Barkley, who had



—Justus in the Minneapolis Star.

The Fight Against Inflation

in his own words "carried the flag of this Administration for seven years over rougher territory than was ever traversed by any previous majority leader." Mr. Paul is probably too uncritical of the \$10,500,000,000 tax bill which the Administration had requested of Congress at that time. But no one could be too hard on the monstrously inadequate bill which was vetoed by President Roosevelt and passed over his veto. The President called it "not a tax bill but a tax-relief bill providing relief not for the needy but for the greedy." Mr. Paul implies that these harsh words were the President's own carefully chosen words, not the words of Judge Rosenman or Justice Byrnes.

But the weakness of the 78th Congress, while primarily responsible for the eventual breakdown of the whole anti-inflation program, should not blind us to the unfortunate fact that the Treasury itself had failed to plan ahead, and consequently was ill-prepared when it should have taken the leadership in the anti-inflation program. It was not the established, powerful, old-line agency that led the anti-inflation fight but rather the fledgling Office of Price Administration under a man to whom Mr. Paul refers at one point as the "turbulent Leon Henderson." There were many times when the staff in OPA longed

to see a bit more "turbulence" in the Treasury.

If Mr. Paul's war history chapters are the most generally interesting part of his book, there is much more here than mere history. Actually in the last two parts, the author gives us a vigorous and persuasive statement of the case for using carefully calculated taxation and fiscal policy as a means for maintaining a high level of business activity and a relatively stable economic system, at least one from which extreme fluctuations have been eliminated. To Mr. Paul, federal taxes are the means or instruments of sound general economic planning, not merely revenue raising devices. He knows that they have an unavoidable general impact which we ignore at our peril. Moreover, he appreciates the fact that the way the federal government handles an annual budget, which is more likely to be over thirty billion dollars a year than under that figure for some time to come, will be of crucial though not, of course, of exclusive importance in determining the level of business activity.

As he himself puts it, "Well planned taxes can materially help us to achieve economic stability. Taxes can be used as the occasion warrants, to regulate the speed of the economic machine. They can be used to curb inflation or arrest deflation." With the general validity of Mr. Paul's economic analysis I have little quarrel. He is more sophisticated in his appreciation of the relation of the tax burden to investment as well as to consumption than are many of the young economists who prattle glibly in Keynesian terms. But it does seem to me that he, like so many others, almost completely overlooks the overwhelming political and administrative difficulty in the United States of actually making operative the sensible taxation program which he advocates.

Certainly we need a tax system equipped with what others have called "built-in flexibility" and we need the kind of fiscal policy which Mr. Paul outlines so brilliantly. But while it would be a pleasant escape to do so, we must not forget how federal fiscal policy and taxation measures are actually formulated. Read the newspapers and weep. But read Mr. Paul's book and maybe you will feel like doing something about it. There is much that might be done, and vigorous, insistent public opinion will help to get it done.

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SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 686)

BARROWS DUNHAM:
MAN AGAINST MYTH

The human race, which abolished slavery . . . which learned and practised political democracy, cannot be eternally thwarted of control over its entire social destiny. . . . The dreams men dream while waking can become the substance of a world.