

Core of Battle

TOWARD AN UNKNOWN STATION. By Allan Lyon. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 286 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER KLEIN

ALLAN LYON'S semi-factual dramatized account of a few crucial weeks in the life of an infantry platoon in the ETO in the winter of 1944 might have been an important book. Bare of ornament, subservient neither to plot nor theme, patently honest in intention, it attempts to present the stripped core of battle experience. To millions this could have supplied the still missing link between headlines and combat reports and the events they so inadequately mirrored. The book might also have been a revelatory spiritual document.

But, although occasional scenes remain vividly in the mind—notably one depicting a meeting between battle-weary troops and merely Army-weary GI's, and another of men, temporarily out of the fight, watching their comrades fall dead comically in puppet battle—and although some sense of the Kafkaesque orgy of battle-operations errors is gradually made palpable to the reader, the book as a whole fails to achieve its purpose. Unfortunately it takes more than a truthful, detailed, documented report to achieve emotional impact; it takes selectivity, focus, drive, a keen level of insight, and technical ability. All these are largely lacking in "Toward an Unknown Station."

Mr. Lyon is at his best when reporting the elemental facts of men reduced to a primitive level, retaining only the dignity of animals—and that tarnished by civilization. The most heroic character in the book is incidental to the main narrative: a Polish slave-worker who is also the simplest, least "civilized" of all, lacking even the rudimentary three R's of the most ignorant GI, and almost as free of the accoutrements of our industrial age as a feudal serf. Compared to her, Rusty, a red-bearded sergeant, the only GI with real guts in the entire volume, is simply a successful machine-made product. Rusty dies in battle, but the Polish woman carries on stolidly.

Practically every GI in the book pays lip-service to the doctrine that only the idiotic are willing to be heroes and that the only sensible course is to be a shirker and get away with it. But, as on the home front, only a very few live up to their expressed ideals. In several respects, however, Mr. Lyon's GI's

differ from the standard model. They do not speak at length of their homes, wives, children, and girl friends. In fact they hardly think about them, because they are too tired, too miserable, too frightened, too preoccupied with the innumerable details of the impossible present. And you will search in vain for the usual sexual episodes; in that respect the author has undoubtedly made a one-man revolution. His only concession to the convention is some bits of rather tame dialogue.

The volume has the merits of simplicity. Embedded in the narrative are occasional naive, fresh paragraphs in which the discerning will discover a child's truthful, if inadvertent, parables for our time. And anyone who wants to know how GI's felt, talked, suffered, will find the record here. It is a minor section in what is already a majority report.

Fiction Notes

THE MOON IS MINE, by Arthemise Goertz. Whittlesey House. \$3. Something more from the subway circuit. This time the tree flourishes in Astoria, but it casts the familiar shade. An overcrowded house, replete with indigent relatives, drives the working girl to escape life's pressures in the usual way. A rich playboy comes across with the emerald-cut diamond, but it's the boy on the block who finally supplies the moon.

The horror of the underprivileged facing life, death, and endless toil is relieved, in this case, by Pop. Erstwhile spear-carrier, dabbler in any job that allows him gaudy uniforms, he remains gay and loving and hopeful to the last. He is Miss Goertz's welcome contribution to an otherwise bleary roster of unavoidably frustrated souls.

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KATHERINE AND THE DARK ANGEL, by Mary Reiser. Dodd, Mead. \$2.75. Miss Reisner has attempted to deal with fears, their causes and their cures. Her study is superficial, lacking in motive and conviction. A little less obvious touch might have pushed this slight novel into the melodramatic. It is exciting to get at the truth, but the search should have suspense.

Beautiful, frightened Katherine Lee, entirely dependent on her evil cousin, meets and falls in love with an English writer in sunny Italy. Katherine has by sudden death lost two men she loved. Fearful of further entanglements, she still cannot resist her new-found passion. The lovers flee to Venice, facing the fact that he has been falsely accused but fairly acquitted of his former wife's murder.



Knowledge sets the pair free forever. They can settle down to conquering their individual neuroses together.

A nice feeling for Italy only succeeds in slowing the story and the merest swatches of characterization make us impatient for a fuller picture. Miss Reisner has unfortunately coated her nightmare with sunshine.

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THE MOVING STAIRS, by Paul Pickrel. Harper. \$2.50. Mr. Pickrel herewith presents a token of his affection for the decent, often ineptly termed "little people" of this earth. With quick, observant strokes against a typical small-town background, he creates rounded characters. Some are moral, others have strayed, still others have been proven false, but a fundamental innocence pervades their lives. Their unrealized dreams persist. Young Pat renounces art for love; her perennially lax mother marries her lates "Gentleman Caller"; Gram-pa grows old, while the seasons pass and nothing really changes. Simplicity, humor, and a refreshing tenderness mark these pages.

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THE TREE WITHIN, by I. V. Morris. Doubleday. \$3. In the case of Jacques Leroy the inner man is pretty deeply imbedded. A pulsating Frenchman, aware of catastrophe from the Munich moment on, he cannot bring himself to act until after his wife and three of his four children have been bombed, and he has accidentally become involved in the Resistance. He finds courage in participation and a lasting single-mindedness through suffering literally untold rigors in prison camp.

Several affairs and a loving look at the peasant as well as the Parisian supply a Gallic flavor. But there is an emotional remoteness and a strangely static approach to events that denies the obligatory excitement. Suspense is in order for this individual as well as for his beloved country.

—CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN.

The World. A year ago the now-defunct magazine '47 asked Albert Einstein to name some books which would help laymen understand the subject of atomic energy and its implications for the human race. He suggested five titles: "Exploring the Atom" by Selig Hecht, "Hiroshima" by John Hersey, "Peace or Anarchy" by Cord Meyer, Jr., "The Anatomy of Peace" by Emery Reves, and "In the Name of Sanity" by Raymond Swing. This week we review a book which seems to merit a place on the same shelf: David Bradley's "No Place to Hide" by its vivid report of the 1946 atomic bomb tests at Bikini underscores the contemporary crisis. Winfield's "China: The Land and the People" and Visson's "As Others See Us" (both reviewed below) should help illuminate some of the problems the bomb has raised for Americans.

Bikini's Real Story

NO PLACE TO HIDE. By David Bradley. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1948. 182 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by NORMAN COUSINS

THERE is no law to compel anyone to read this book. But one thing is certain: If you do, you will have a missionary fervor about it and will try to badger everyone you know into reading it. It is that kind of book. It is simply, effectively, occasionally beautifully, written. It is a short book—you can read it at a single sitting—and in addition to coming away with a thoroughly satisfying reading experience, you have the feeling that you have filled in an important gap in your atomic-age education. What more could anyone expect of a book?

As I read this, I know it sounds like a jacket blurb; but there is no point in writing a restrained review when you have something really worth getting excited about. This book is the story of Bikini—told as it has not been told before in the official reports or in the dispatches of the correspondents and observers and broadcasters. For the biggest part of the Bikini story developed long after the two explosions, long after the press ship had turned around to go home, long after the brilliant night skyline of colored lights from Operation Crossroads had become a graveyard for dead and diseased warships. The real story was not the spectacle but the aftermath, and David Bradley, a former newspaperman turned doctor who was assigned to the Radiological Safety Section of the Bikini tests, was one of those whose job it was to stay behind in the months after the explosions to study the effects and collect information on a subject which is as important to man but as mysterious as the

discovery of fire thousands of years ago.

Bradley kept a diary during those months and has drawn from it in dramatizing the highlights of his Bikini trip. The tests themselves, while vividly described, are actually only incidental to the major theme of the book, which is that the principal danger of atomic warfare is represented not by the blast and the heat (estimated at the split second of detonation to be greater by far than the temperature of the sun), but by the strong and unmanageable force of radioactivity. He makes clearer, or at least more vivid, than anyone else has yet done, the vast problem of radioactivity, pointing out that while

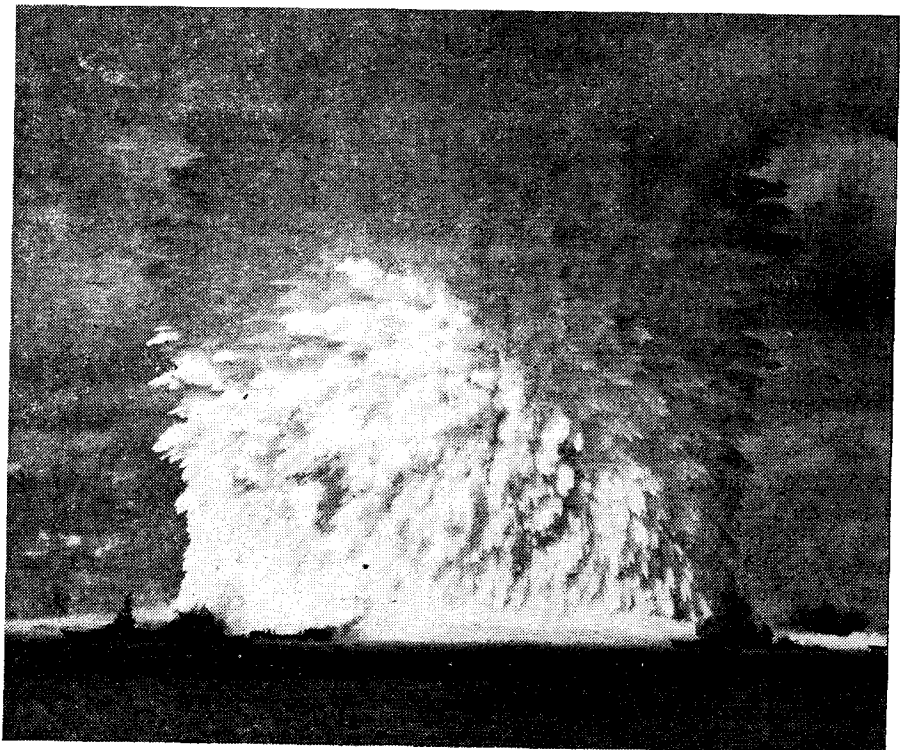
the presence of Geigers emitted by a uranium bomb can be measured by a counter, the fissioned products of a plutonium bomb are largely unmeasurable—except, of course, through the presence of casualties. And while the military viewed the Bikini tests almost entirely in terms of Naval problems, Bradley kept thinking about atomic warfare as it most likely would be used—against populations.

At least at this time we do know that Bikini is not some faraway little atoll pin-pointed on an out-of-the-way chart. Bikini is San Francisco Bay, Puget Sound, East River. It is the Thames, the Adriatic, Hellespont, and misty Baikal. It isn't just King Juda and his displaced native subjects about whom we have to think—or to forget.

At a time when the world has virtually accepted the inevitability of another war, and when defense commissions in the United States are devising elaborate plans to "reduce vulnerability" through new techniques and programs for coordinated community action in the event of war, Bradley states flatly, as other atomic scientists have done, that there is no defense against atomic attack.

No defense, that is, except getting rid of war itself. For, as Bradley says:

There are no satisfactory countermeasures [against the bomb] and methods of decontamination. There are no satisfactory medical or sanitary safeguards for the people of atomized areas. The devastating influence of the bomb and its unborn relatives may affect the land and its wealth—and there-



—Joint Task Force One & the Wm. H. Wise Co.
Operation Crossroads—"... graveyard for dead and diseased warships."