

have lost their pertinence for modern readers.

Encouraged by Mr. Symons's subtitle, one turns to his "Thomas Carlyle" in the hope that he has attempted the synthesis we need. An initial sketch of Carlyle's position at the time of his address as rector of the University of Edinburgh in 1866, the effective end of his creative career, also promises well. But it soon becomes evident that Mr. Symons is not really interested in Carlyle's thought. His knowledge of nineteenth-century intellectual history is slight, and he displays little acquaintance with recent Carlylean scholarship. It almost seems, indeed, that he has rephrased for his own guidance a famous question of Sydney Smith's: who reads an American book about Carlyle? In view of these deficiencies in his equipment, it is not surprising that his last word hardly differs from Traill's judgment fifty-four years ago. Carlyle "rubbed the wrong lamps," we are told, "but he was a great magician."

Mr. Symons focuses his attention upon Carlyle as a person rather than as a thinker, and with this aspect of his subject he is fully competent to deal. Though his book cannot compare with "Necessary Evil" (the recent biography of Jane Welsh Carlyle, by Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson) in respect to the new information that it provides, he at any rate retells the story of Carlyle's life pleasantly and expertly from the principal published sources. He treats the controversial issues raised by Carlyle's contorted personality sanely and sympathetically. He relates the usual anecdotes with a nice feeling for proportion, and he introduces the customary subordinate figures with a vivid sense of character. If one is surprised to find Fanny Kemble passing unrecognized as "a Mrs. Pierce Butler"; if one is disheartened to discover Carlyle's resounding dismissal of Herbert Spencer as "the most unending ass in Christendom" flattened to "an immeasurable ass," such lapses are infrequent and unimportant. For the most part Mr. Symons makes his way through the jungle of nineteenth-century social history with ease and adroitness.

At one point in his narrative Mr. Symons offers the reader a summary of "Sartor Resartus," remarking by way of excuse, "The book is so little read that a short account of it may be useful." He has here anticipated a fair verdict on his own work. For readers unacquainted with Carlyle, Mr. Symons provides an engaging first glimpse. For those already well versed in things Victorian, he presents little in the way of fact or interpretation that will not already be familiar.

The Peace Which Is Hard to Find

ALL I COULD NEVER BE. By Beverley Nichols. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 348 pp. \$4.

By R. ELLIS ROBERTS

MR. NICHOLS has been places and met people; unfortunately, if one may judge from this mixture of society gossip, local color, occasional heart-searchings, and autobiography, no one he ever meets interests him as much as does Beverley Nichols. That is all right for readers who enjoy watching Mr. Nichols in excited or admiring rapture at some new attitude. He is—and he admits that he is not yet adult—for all the world like a baby crawling on the floor and suddenly seeing himself in a mirror. Other things in the world interest Mr. Nichols, but it is his own reflection which fascinates him.

Some of his attitudes are as surprising as they are distasteful. In defending that deplorable and ungrateful novel "Evensong," which he wrote about Melba, in whose employment he had been, he writes: "It was inevitable, when Melba died, that I should write a novel about a prima donna. Not to have done so would have been a dereliction of my duty as an artist." As an artist, Mr. Nichols? Vanity of this kind is so simple-

rising above the gossip column. Mr. Nichols's inability ever to give more than a superficial view of the many people he has met is no doubt explained by his very odd standards of social intercourse. In writing of a well-known Edwardian hostess, who had told him stories about her friends, he says, "I would not have listened so attentively to the stories if I had not realized there was money in them."

The last third of the book, however, has more feeling, better taste, and deals not so lightly, even when it is gossipy, with people and events. The change comes when Mr. Nichols writes about his part in the pacifist movement (afterwards repudiated), his search for an escape from his childish secularism, his brief immersion in Buchmanism, and his pathetic attempts to appease the Nazis by giving Ribbentrop a luncheon party and being friendly with Otto von Bismarck. Even the style is not so infuriatingly arch (no longer has it such phrases as Mr. Otto Kahn "was, in short, a very considerable dear") and a certain gravity settles on this luckless man who seemed doomed in the earlier pages to remain perpetually "a bright young thing." In fact, while the earlier part of the book is as vulgar as were "Twenty-Five" and "Are They the Same at Home?," the later pages seem to be written at a different time by a different author.

Towards the end Mr. Nichols relates his adventures at the Olympic Games when they were held in Berlin. He was, through sheer carelessness—he was recovering from a severe nervous breakdown—the cause of the execution of a luckless anti-Nazi whom he had befriended. Without looking at it, he gave the youth a ticket he had received from Lord Burghley, head of the British delegation. He thought it was for standing-room; actually it was for a distinguished guest, and would have put this young man, who had already been in prison for his opinions, in a box just behind Hitler. The boy was arrested and shot the next morning. Mr. Nichols tells the story well. That carelessness of his seems a symbol of the world's attitude towards Nazism.

In these pages, as in the fantastic accounts of his interviews with Ribbentrop, the book rises to the level of really good reporting. It is still a
(Continued on page 31)

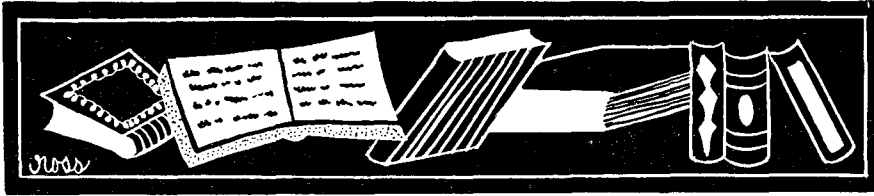


Beverley Nichols—"not yet adult."

minded as to be almost incredible. It should be mentioned, however, that Mr. Nichols writes that "the finest artists are cads all the time," although the lesser can be gentlemen on Mondays and cads on Tuesdays.

The first two hundred pages of this book are on this cheap level, rarely

R. Ellis Roberts at one time was literary editor of the *New Statesman* and *Time* and *Tide of London*.



An Open Letter to Milton— Formidable Pamphleteer

ANTONIO IGLESIAS

NOW that freedom is being as seriously menaced as it was in your day by its friends as well as by its foes, I am writing this letter to you because you certainly knew what to do face to face with a great crisis such as ours. In the present-day crisis, in which the liberty of man is being systematically stifled and openly denied in large sections of the world, even in the most powerful of democracies, here in the United States of America, some of the professed defenders of personal freedom are shortsightedly and foolishly trying to save it in principle by suppressing some of its concrete manifestations. Forgetting in their fright that freedom is what freedom does, overlooking the fact that the means which are used inexorably determine the end which is attained, and borrowing in their blind haste the very weapons of the enemies of freedom, these thoughtless would-be champions of human liberty seem to be bent on destroying it piecemeal so as to keep its grand totality intact, perfect, and undefiled. With their compulsory loyalty oaths, their drastic restrictions of academic freedom, their wholesale expurgations of textbooks, and other similar remedies, they are like the barber-surgeons of your time who sometimes would conscientiously bleed a patient to death to save him from his tuberculosis. That is why I, who love freedom with all my heart but also with my whole mind, write to you now asking for your help in this hour of our great need. For if anyone can be of real assistance in this grave predicament in which we find ourselves, you emphatically are the man to help us.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the third of an occasional series of "Open Literary Letters" by Antonio Iglesias, SR contributor and author of "Culture's Emergent Pathway."*

I have often thought of the tremendous price you had to pay for what could have been your loss and certainly has been our gain. One way of estimating that price is to contrast the quiet placidity of your studious youth with the violent tumultuousness of the twenty-odd years you subsequently devoted to party politics. You must have loved freedom and your countrymen very much indeed to have given up the former for the latter activity. In the end, of course, the contemplator of Truth and Beauty and the active defender of Freedom and Justice became fused into the major poet and the great prophet of the Lord; but you could not have foreseen such a supreme fulfillment when, in your thirty-first year, you gave up the gentle pursuit of poetry for the rough-and-tumble of politics.

You yourself have told us how early and how thoroughly you were dedicated to learning: "My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature; and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies or went to bed before midnight. . . . My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches; which, however, could not chill the ardor of my curiosity or retard the progress of my improvement." I am told by your biographers that your teachers at

Saint Paul's School later looked upon you as a student of "excellent erudition and somewhat strange views." And at Cambridge University you were considered an outspoken radical for very good reasons, because, among other things, you must have frequently said aloud what you wrote later, that it was hard for you to digest "the asinine feast of sowthistles and brambles" with which the professors stuffed the students' minds, while they "persisted in starving their spirits." All of us who have gone to college know just what you meant by these strong words, although I, for one, found and avidly devoured a fragment of "Areopagitica" in a college textbook, among other nourishing morsels of English literature.

You also must have found rich and nutritious intellectual and spiritual fare at Cambridge, because you have related yourself that when you left the university you thanked "the Fellows of that College who, at my parting, after I had taken two degrees, assured me of their singular good affection toward me." And I know from other sources that you were by then a bachelor and a master of arts; a proficient reader of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian and French; a poet who could write poetry with equal facility and felicity in English and in Latin, and an earnest young man of twenty-four who had most seriously decided to devote his life to learning and to literature.

IN SENDING you to Cambridge your loving and admiring father—a musician and composer of distinction, as well as a prosperous money-lender—had hoped that you would also prepare for the church. But you resolutely set your Puritanical mind against such a possibility, alleging that "tyranny had invaded the church" and that, as you could not honestly subscribe to the oaths and the other obligations required of all Anglican clergymen, you "thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." You meant, of course, that you were too good a Christian to make a profitable business of your Christianity, and that, rather than take chances with the shifting Anglicanism of Bishop Laud and of Charles I, you would stake your very life and your eternal salvation in serving both God and your fellowmen as His poet-prophet.

With this high purpose in mind, you "retired" to your father's house in Horton, the "village of rivulets and nightingales," where you stayed during the happiest six years of your