



James Hanley

By Granville Hicks

JAMES HANLEY was born in Dublin in 1901, went to sea in 1914, and published his first novel in 1930. Since then he has published thirty or more books, and in England he is highly regarded. Three or four of his books were released in this country in the Thirties, but then no more until 1953, when "The Closed Harbor" appeared and in some quarters received high praise. Now we have "An End and a Beginning" (Horizon, \$3.95).

"An End and a Beginning" is related to other novels of Hanley's, but, since I assume that most of its readers will be unfamiliar with the earlier work, I should like to examine it first in isolation. "There was the high wall," the first sentence reads, "the great door, and the roads leading north and south." A man is released from prison, and is met by representatives of an aid society. He refuses their help but accepts a message they have for him, an enigmatic message that in time leads him to Cornelius Delaney, secretary of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The man—we learn, in time, that his name is Peter Fury—visits his brother-in-law and is visited by his brother, but what he chiefly does is to wander about a city called Gelton. At last, armed with another cryptic message, he goes to Ireland, learns the story of the death of his father and mother, and finds his way, as directed by the second message, to a remote country place.

Up to this point Peter Fury's pilgrimage has the mysterious, compulsive, and abstract quality of the experiences of one of Samuel Beckett's characters. It is the quality that led some reviewers of "The Closed Harbor" to see it as an example of existentialism. After Peter reaches Ram's Gate, however, various relationships are established. From the revelations he makes to a casually encountered monk and from the thoughts that pass through his mind as he talks, we learn something about the murder that led to his fifteen-year incarceration. We see Peter through the eyes of the aged and obstinate caretaker of Ram's Gate, Miss Fetch. And then his sister-in-law, Sheila, who has left her husband, comes to Ram's Gate, and she and Peter enter upon a frustrating love affair.

The first part of the novel offers a

remarkable portrayal of a man driven by forces he cannot comprehend, but it is in the second part that Hanley seems to me to excel. Here are three persons living in the closest proximity, two of them spending their nights in the same bed, and yet each is completely alone. Sheila and Peter are Hanley's major characters, and he does well with them, but Miss Fetch is a striking figure. Her long-established way of life, meager enough but well loved by her, is disrupted by the advent of the lovers, and her resentment and her resolute resistance are persuasively rendered.

The novel is complete in itself, but the reader is aware of a density in the background, and of course that background exists in print. In "The Furies," published in this country in 1935, Hanley presented an Irish working-class family unhappily transplanted to England, and introduced not only Peter Fury but also his brothers and his sister, his domineering mother, and his pathetic father. "The Secret Journey," appearing the next year, continued the chronicle of the family, with emphasis on the events leading to Peter's murder of Mrs. Ragner, a moneylender who had been exploiting the family. In the third volume, "Our Times Has Gone" (never published in the United States), other members of the family came to the fore, Peter being in prison, and the book ended with the supposed death at sea of Mr. Fury. However, as we learn from "Winter Song," published in England in 1950, Mr. Fury survived, though crippled in mind and body, and "Winter Song" tells how at last he and his wife returned to Ireland, where, as "An End and a Beginning" discloses, they met death strangely.

No one has written more convincingly than Hanley about working-class life, and in the Thirties he was inevitably hailed as a proletarian novelist. He had a better claim to the title than most of the writers to whom it was applied, for he had belonged to the proletariat and he wrote about it with both knowledge and sympathy, but, unlike most of the so-called proletarian novelists, he was not a sectarian. He was outraged by inequality and injustice, but his deepest concern was always with the human condition rather than with institutions. His view of the human condition, always bleak enough, seems to have grown bleaker with the years.

"How horrible life can be," says one of the characters in "The Closed Harbor." "It is only by some visitation of grace that one endures it." Says Cornelius Delaney in "An End and a Beginning": "What we learn in our work is the very essence of the human situation. What we discover is not the excesses, but the pathetic limitations. And you would be astonished, though we are not, *not* at the height to which the human creature can climb but at the depths to which it can sink. I say it in no admonishing terms, young man, it is far too tragic for censure."

"An End and a Beginning" will not square at all points with the earlier volumes of the Fury chronicle. For instance, the account of the killing of Mrs. Ragner that is given here differs in many details from the account in "The Secret Journey." But Hanley has never worried about consistency, and there are discrepancies within this volume: Peter is sometimes described as thirty-one, sometimes as thirty-three; it is said that the boat he takes to Ireland leaves in the morning, and then again it is said that it leaves at night; in one scene eleven o'clock appears to come before ten. These slips, for which there are parallels in earlier novels, tell us something about the way Hanley's imagination works. He is not in a superficial sense a realist, although he can use masses of realistic detail when that serves his purpose. What interests him is found in the depths of men's minds.

HANLEY'S strength lies, and has always lain, in his rendering of emotion. This he does in a variety of ways. The opening chapters of "An End and a Beginning" are almost completely objective: we are told what Peter does and what he says and what is said to him, and thus we are led to grasp intuitively his feelings. On the other hand, when he tells his story to Brother Anselm, the bare details he sets forth are amplified by sudden and dazzling flashes of memory. Later Hanley presents the states of mind of Peter, Sheila, and Miss Fetch by means of uncommonly successful interior monologues. He is a resourceful craftsman albeit sometimes a careless one.

I wonder why Hanley has won so little recognition in this country. In England he has been praised by E. M. Forster, C. P. Snow, Henry Greer and many others, but over here he seems to be known and admired by only a few of us. He has his faults, but they are outweighed by his virtues. In compassion and in power, as C. P. Snow has said, he is surpassed by none of his contemporaries.

Mighty Both the Sword and Pencil

"The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G." (World. 508 pp. \$6), is a straight-from-the-shoulder account of his life and controversies by Britain's famous field commander. The autobiography is evaluated by Major General Jim Dan Hill, Army, U.S., Ret., who is both an historian and the president of State College in Superior, Wis.

By Jim Dan Hill

NEXT to a victory on a field of battle, Field-Marshal Montgomery likes nothing better than to win an argument with a final pen-thrust to the heart of his opponent's major premise. It is in that spirit that he has nursed his memoirs through sundry polemics. Moreover, he is often enough so forcefully and unforgivably right as to alienate the sympathies of many whom he converts. But Monty never asked for sympathy, nor does he write for it. He just wants to win. And he wants to do it within the basic rule of the game: i.e., blunt honesty.

A less forthright man, for example, would have written of his mother more kindly. From the Field-Marshal's sharp pencil (yes, every word with a pencil but with hard lead, no

doubt) his mother appears to have been a parsimonious, penny-pinching, nagging driver with a harsh, flint-garnished soul. His father, a benign high churchman, was quite the reverse. Thus Bernard Law Montgomery loved his father, resented his mother.

But by the time Germany's idolized Afrika Korps is driven from Egypt to destruction in distant Tunisia, the reader realizes full well that it was the harsh mother's son and not the benevolent father's pet who cracked the whip. Perhaps Montgomery is hardly aware of this himself. Otherwise he might have given the old girl a posthumous, rhetorical bouquet as a commendation to Clio for having endowed him with the very uncompromising and driving qualities that have brought him battlefield fame.

From his father perhaps came the clergylike, calm assurance that both logic and the Lord are on his side. And he is sure there is no substitute for the spoken word in reaching the hearts of men. Few military memoirs reproduce so much of so many of the autobiographers' military speeches. And those subordinate commanders who heard him will testify that, through judicious restraint, calm intonation, and artful repetition of terminal phrases, his remarks were far more effective than is suggested by the rough abstracts reproduced in this book.

In psychology of command, Monty reveals himself a master. He early sought an eccentricity for identifying

himself to and with his men, whom he accepted as patriotic civilians rather than spit-and-polish, peacetime yard birds. Thus Monty was the first English general to affect enlisted men's "battle dress." When other high-rankers copied him, he consciously sought another "signature." By accident it took the form of a tank driver's beret with two bright crests where every recruit knew there should be but one. America's General George Patton, with the same consciousness of purpose, established a more flamboyant "signature" with pearl-handled six-shooters in Western holsters, only he called them his "trade-mark."

As long as Monty was the top Allied general on the battlefields of Africa and Normandy, his memoirs indicate satisfaction with strategy and tactics in his theatre. When Eisenhower took direct command in France and Monty became just another army group commander—as were Omar Bradley and others—Monty reveals himself as a poor team man. There are many post mortems upon what-might-have-been.

His principal complaint was Eisenhower's failure to delegate to one man, preferably himself, the command of the entire front. He did offer to serve under Bradley. The strategy Monty advocated was one, and only one, main effort. He holds that in the battle of the Bulge (Ardennes) the Germans forced Ike to adopt the essentials of Monty's proposed strategy, but too late to end the war in 1944.

In all this, Montgomery is quite persuasive, but he will convince few. The political and diplomatic folly of



Every word of the book
was written in pencil
in my own handwriting.
Montgomery of Alamein
F.M.

Left: Churchill, called by Montgomery "the greatest Englishman of all times," visits the Field-Marshal's Tac Headquarters at Blay, Normandy, in 1944. Right: Nine-year-old Montgomery, whose mother endowed him with the uncompromising and driving qualities that brought him battlefield fame and whose churchman father gave him "his clergylike, calm assurance that both logic and the Lord are on his side."

