

of love. For Ruth alone she means us to be sorry, but Ruth, as Mrs. Mortimer presents her, is so crushed and inert as to be nearly imbecile, and the pity she evokes is detached not sympathetic. It is a bizarre corrective to Mrs. Mortimer's clever, horrid picture to remember that just such a group as this provides the most common background to the domestic English detective story—where lives, if limited and tending, of course, to murder—are at least lively and generally friendly, loving, and cheerful.

—MARGHANITA LASKI.

**ONE MAN'S HUMOR:** Aubrey Menen's *"The Fig Tree"* (Scribners, \$3.50) professes to be a meaningful parable about the irresponsibility of Science, which raises the Flesh over the Spirit and permits experiment without thought of consequences; yet it is quite plain that the author could hardly have cared less, either for his "message" or the "entertainment" in which he dresses it.

The result of this complacency is that, neither characters nor action being developed beyond joke-value, the parable is like a self-satisfied footnote to odd goings-on, quite unrelated. Added to this is stylistic archness ("Joe looked like the historian, Edward Gibbon, parboiled"), oversimplification, and a would-be English public schoolboy's attitude towards sex. ("We shall be seen," said Isabella. "Let us go to your bedroom." "Never," Joe said passionately, "that horrible place makes me think of nothing but sex.")

The novel concerns a renowned scientist who invents an acid that stimulates plant growth. An overdose of this acid turns some figs into powerful aphrodisiacs and, in the words of the publisher, "The scientist and a friend find themselves in undreamed-of situations." These situations are just about what you'd expect: the toppings of various females, a giggly awareness of satyrism, and genteel slapstick concerning the higher levels of church and state. One man's humor, we all know, is another man's boredom, but humor that neither bears a visible relation to truth nor comments upon, examines, castigates, or affects the real world at all is no humor at all, or vacuum-humor; it's what Pope would have called "witling's wit."

"The Fig Tree" displays the urbane intellectual's disbelief in everything and his inability to challenge any of his disbeliefs; it is so polite and suave that it passes through the mind leaving hardly a trace.

Mr. Menen's novel is a long retreat from his previous books; it is a fraud, perpetrated by the author against himself, his talent, and his own wit.

—KEITH BOTSFORD.

## THE PAST

# The Blues and Grays of Britain

*"The King's War: 1641-1647," by C. V. Wedgwood (Macmillan, 703 pp. \$7.50), is the second instalment of the author's series, "The Great Rebellion," a full, rich history of the English Civil War and the Commonwealth period, which Miss Wedgwood has been writing at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Harry T. Moore, of Southern Illinois University, a current Guggenheim Fellow now editing D. H. Lawrence's collected letters, writes frequently on the life and times of Oliver Cromwell, and is now preparing an introduction to a new edition of Sprigge's "Anglia Rediviva" (1647).*

By Harry T. Moore

THE SECOND volume of C. V. Wedgwood's history of England's Great Rebellion and its subsequent "republican experiment" deals with most of the famous battles before Preston and Drogheda and with the political, economic, and religious tangles of the age. The action of the story begins in January, 1642, when Charles I rashly descended on Parliament to arrest five troublesome members who were tipped off in time to disappear via the watergate. The narrative continues to January, 1647, when his Scots captors handed Charles over to the parliamentary army. Meanwhile, in a series of disasters that included the battles of Marston Moor and Naseby, the king had lost the Civil War, whose principal military stake was possession of London.

Our own Civil War is at the present more apt to magnetize the interest of American readers, but they cannot too often be told that those British conflicts of three centuries ago presented almost every problem we have today, and that an understanding of those deceptively far-off events gives us a deeper understanding of ourselves. Miss Wedgwood doesn't fritter away valuable space with obvious parallels, but she is the best historian to read, now, on the epoch of Charles I

and Cromwell. Admittedly, she is not so minutely thorough as the late-nineteenth-century historians who rediscovered that period: the wide-ranging Firth, with his excavation of so many of its documents, and Gardiner, the painstaking chronicler who was sometimes encyclopedic to the point of dullness. On the other hand, Miss Wedgwood in grace of writing doesn't equal Trevelyan in his briefer *"England Under the Stuarts"* (1904), but she does write with clarity and liveliness, in a manner that today's readers will find attractive.

Scholars will also value her books, for Miss Wedgwood has made extensive use of manuscript sources which, if they do not make us drastically revise our picture of the time, at least add new lights, as well as shadows and angles, to its baroque complications. Following up the expert analysis, in her first volume, of the events of 1637 to 1641, Miss Wedgwood in the present instalment again shows her ability to synthesize masses of material in the way in which she describes the confusions of England, Scotland, and Ireland at the moment the war was beginning. No one has done this more intelligibly or more dramatically, and Miss Wedgwood proceeds from this point to her spirited account of unrolling events.

In this book she wisely stars Charles rather than Cromwell, whose great fame lay yet ahead. At this time he was revealing his power as a soldier and was beginning to take command of Parliament itself, but even to Cromwell the central figure of those years was Charles. The author views him sympathetically, but she is not astigmatic to his faults of stubbornness and imprudence. Miss Wedgwood's true hero in this volume seems to be Charles's nephew and cavalry chief, the flaring Prince Rupert, whose dallying at the baggage train after his first successful charge at Naseby the historian carefully ignores in these pages.


Near the end of *"The King's War"* two men who will be important in

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## The Debate Is Over

**T**HE DEBATE on the danger of radioactive fallout has ended. Commissioner Willard F. Libby, of the Atomic Energy Commission, has now acknowledged a "real concern" over contamination resulting from the testing of nuclear explosives.

Two recent events may have contributed to this concern. The first is that Southern California experienced a radioactive fallout far higher than the danger line specified by the AEC. The second came a few weeks ago when the wheat fields of northern Minnesota were dusted by an over-the-safety-limit quantity of radioactive strontium.

The significance of Dr. Libby's present concern is related to the fact that he is the Government scientist chiefly responsible for having assured the President and the American people in the past that the risk involved in nuclear testing was too small to worry about. Along with Dr. Edward Teller, Dr. Libby was one of the most influential spokesmen in blocking any serious effort to arrive at a world-wide ban on nuclear testing *even if inspection and enforceable safeguards could be worked out.*

It was more than three years ago that the possible danger to human bone and tissue, as well as to food, was called to the public attention by independent scientists *outside* the AEC. At that time, Commissioner Libby contended that the problem was negligible. One year later, Dr. Albert Schweitzer issued his now famous "Declaration of Conscience," in which he said that the explosion of nuclear weapons represented a violation of the natural rights of man, threatening his health, his air, his water, and his food. Dr. Schweitzer

called on all nations to renounce the explosions before the atomic armaments race got totally out of control, brooking the danger either of a world-destroying war or wholesale contamination of the atmosphere, or both. Dr. Libby's reply to Dr. Schweitzer no longer used the adjective "negligible." This time he acknowledged that a "small risk" was involved, but he said that the security of the free world depended on keeping ahead of the Soviet Union in the arms race.

In any event, Dr. Libby now asserts a "real concern." Those who opposed him can take no satisfaction in the fact that they were right. Nor does Dr. Libby's recent resignation from the AEC and the discontinuation of Dr. Teller's advisory position with the AEC correct the situation they were largely instrumental in bringing about. Even if not another bomb is exploded, the atmosphere will carry a burden of poisonous radioactivity for many years to come. There is no known way of washing the sky; no way to keep the strontium and the cesium from falling like rain; no way to keep it from getting into food and milk and thence into the bones of children where it will create radiation pockets in the bone marrow. But we can at least try to keep the situation from becoming immeasurably worse. The fact that danger exists is no warrant for multiplying it.

**N**O ONE can question the patriotism of men like Dr. Libby and Dr. Teller. No one can doubt that they honestly felt that our ultimate security depended on the acceptance of their policies. But they are guilty, we believe, of putting false facts before the American people in an attempt

to get those policies accepted. First, they concealed any unfavorable information about the by-product effects of the explosions. Second, when outside information developed, they attempted to minimize the danger.

Didn't they know from the start that the danger was "real?" We find it difficult to believe that they did not. But we believe that they genuinely felt that the loss of thousands of lives was small alongside the millions of lives that they felt would be jeopardized if the Soviet Union should seize nuclear leadership in the world. The weakness in their argument is that the security of the United States depends on arms control rather than on arms supremacy. Therefore, the U.S. should seriously seek effective and enforceable ways of both stopping the tests and putting an end to the nuclear arms race. But this is not what Dr. Teller and Dr. Libby wanted—even if a method of foolproof inspection could be achieved. And they have been working behind the scenes to prevent any agreement at Geneva or anywhere else.

Why do they hold to this position? In private briefing sessions to the press, they express the view that the present large nuclear weapons practically ensure that the next war will be a suicidal one. Therefore, they want the testing to continue to enable them to develop non-suicidal atomic weapons. They don't say that they will donate these weapons to a potential enemy to make sure he will use them on us. Nor do they say why they insisted on developing the suicidal weapons in the first place. There is more than merely a collapse of logic here. There is a surrender to the whole fantasy of absolute power in a way that would have appalled the men at Philadelphia in 1787 and confirmed them in their view of the danger of ever allowing men, even good and honest men, to become more important than law in the operation of a society.

The essential problem before the American people today is not to devise punishments for madness but to put an end to it. It may or may not be too late to stop the nuclear-arms race. Concerning that, no one really knows. But it would be tragic to assume it is. At least we owe it to sanity to make the effort. But it will have to be a large effort. It will have to be large enough to enlist the support of most of the world's peoples. It cannot be a synthetic effort. The moral content must be clear and substantial. If we are capable of such an effort, there is a chance our nation and generation can serve history in the way it most needs to be served in our time.

—N. C.