



Books

SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR SR

LITERARY HORIZONS

This Is the Army, Mr. Jenkins

TWO and a half years ago, reviewing Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, I wrote (SR, Jan. 27, 1962): "Perhaps the most important thing to say about Powell is that he is entertaining in a way that not many writers are, though it would be a mistake to underestimate either his intelligence or his creative power."

The book I was then reviewing was an omnibus volume containing the first three novels in a series called *The Music of Time*. The second set of three novels was subsequently published in one volume, *A Dance to the Music of Time: Second Movement*. Now we have the seventh novel, *The Valley of Bones* (Little, Brown, \$4.50), and once more I have been entertained.

Powell has set out to give an account of a certain segment of British life from about 1920 until something like the present. His hero-narrator, Nick Jenkins, is to be identified with the author, but we are not to suppose that this is in any literal sense autobiography. The career of Nick Jenkins, I assume, parallels Powell's life, but some little distance separates one from the other.

The sixth volume, *The Kindly Ones*, ends with the outbreak of the Second World War. *The Valley of Bones* concerns approximately the first year of that conflict—the period of what was fatuously called "The Phony War." Nick, a second lieutenant, is in training, first in England, then in Northern Ireland, then back in England. So far as he is concerned, nothing vital happens in these eight or ten months, but Nick, as always, is fascinated by the people with whom he comes in contact, men of a sort he had not met before.

In the earlier volumes of the series one of the major sources of interest is the way characters repeatedly recur, often in some situation that astonishes us by revealing something about them that we had not suspected. In the first part of

The Valley of Bones we have a wholly new cast, made up of the people with whom Nick is associated in the service. Another writer might find these people dull as TV commercials, but Powell can say that nothing human seems dull to him, and he makes the reader share his interest.

Here is Rowland Gwatkin, the commanding officer, whose life seems to be completely bound up in the Army until he falls in love with a barmaid. There is Bithel, who is always getting himself into trouble in some surprising and ingenious way. There is the sergeant who kills himself because of his wife's infidelity. Nick quotes a brother-in-law as having said to him: "The popular Press always talks as if only the rich committed adultery. One really can't imagine a more snobbish assumption." One of the things Nick learns in the Army is that members of the working class and the lower middle class have just as many problems as the intelligentsia and the aristocracy.

There are some contacts, of course, with the old life. For instance, in the



23 Literary Horizons: Granville Hicks reviews "The Valley of Bones," by Anthony Powell

24 On the Fringe, by Haskell Frankel

25 The New Equality, by Nat Hentoff; To Be Equal, by Whitney M. Young, Jr.

27 Censorship: The Search for the Obscene, by Morris L. Ernst and Alan U. Schwartz

28 A Curtain of Ignorance, by Felix Greene

29 The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol, translated by Constance Garnett, edited by Leonard J. Kent

31 The American Short Story: Front Line in the National Defense of Literature, by William Peden

31 The Siege of Harlem, by Warren Miller

32 The Long White Night, by Katharine Scherman

32 Powdered Eggs, by Charles Simmons

33 Check List of the Week's New Books

34 Pick of the Paperbacks

course of conversation with a fellow-officer, Nick learns that they have slept with the same women. But it is not until Nick goes on leave that the reader encounters characters from the preceding volumes. Nick joins his wife, who is staying with her sister Frederica. Frederica, it turns out, is engaged to Dicky Umfraville, who in other volumes has been a shadowy and rather dubious figure. Robert, her brother, is having an affair with a Mrs. Wisebite, who is a sister of Nick's old friend, Charles Stringham. And so it goes.

In the earlier books there is almost always a party that brings together people we have met in other situations. Powell handles such scenes brilliantly, moving easily from one person to another without confusing the reader. There is no party in *The Valley of Bones*, but

Frederica has a curious assortment of guests. Nick and Isobel, his wife, naturally talk about the guests, and the reader, so to speak, is allowed to overhear their gossip.

The weekend winds up with a bang. Robert, Nick's brother-in-law, is notified that his leave has been canceled. Buster Foxe arrives, looking for his stepdaughter, Mrs. Wisebite, and he and she quarrel. The friend who is to drive Nick back to Aldershot appears. And Isobel has labor pains.

I was watching for the appearance of Widmerpool, who plays an important, though sometimes ludicrous, role in each of the earlier books. His appearance, however, is postponed to almost the last page: Nick is assigned to a new unit, and discovers that Widmerpool is his superior officer. The book ends:

He had already begun to speak on the telephone when I left the room. I saw that I was now in Widmerpool's power. This, for some reason, gave me a disagreeable, sinking feeling within. On the news that night, motorized elements of the German army were reported as occupying the outskirts of Paris.

It is amazing how well Powell succeeds in making his hero both an actor in drama and an observer, engaged and yet at the same time capable of detachment. As an observer he is sharp-eyed and witty:

I found myself next to Flavia Wisebite. She had a quiet, rather sad manner, suggesting one of these reserved, well-behaved, fairly peevish women, usually of determined character, often to be found as wives, or ex-wives, of notably dissipated men like Flitton or Wisebite. Their peevishness appeared to derive not so much from a husband's ill behavior as to be a trait natural to them, which attracts men of that kind.

Nick is so sensitive to people and to their effects on each other that he is a kind of social barometer, and, indeed, Powell employs a meteorological figure of speech:

When people really hate one another, the tension within them can sometimes make itself felt throughout a room, like atmospheric waves, first hot, then cold, wafted backwards and forwards, as if in an invisible process of air conditioning creating a pervasive physical disturbance. Buster Foxe and Dicky Umfraville, between them, brought about that state.

It is on perceptions of that sort that Powell's novels are based. I read him with delight because I know that on page after page there will be insight and wit and a lucid, subtle prose.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.

ON THE FRINGE

Happy Days Are Here Again

If you can't stand happiness, better skip me this week. I'm devoting the bulk of my space to a happy lion, a happy couple, a happy anniversary, and a very happy publishing house. The happy lion is *The Happy Lion*, hero of a popular children's book series by Louise Fatio, author, and Roger Duvoisin, illustrator, a happily married couple of thirty-nine years' standing. The happy anniversary belongs to the Lion, who became ten years old on August 18. The happy publishing firm is Whittlesey House of McGraw-Hill, and well they might be.

To date, the adventures of the Happy Lion have sold a total of 860,000 copies throughout the world, 350,000 in the United States alone. The books have appeared in fourteen languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Catalan, Afrikaans, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Japanese, Slovenian, Portuguese, Norwegian, and Dutch. The German publisher, Herder, has taken the Happy Lion as its colophon for its better juvenile books. The stories have been read over television in England and Japan, and there was a Happy Lion movie made in 1959 by Rembrandt Films. As for awards, there are slews. Think of an award a children's book can receive for text, illustrations, or both, and chances are good that the Happy Lion has one tucked away in its den. To further honor the much-honored lion, a new book, *The Happy Lion and the Bear*, will be published during this, his anniversary month.

How do the Duvoisins explain their Lion's great success? Louise Fatio Duvoisin, looking not very grandmotherly in a Chanel suit with a corsage of cream orchids on the jacket, said, "I don't explain it at all."

Roger Duvoisin, looking not very grandfatherly in a well-cut British suit, said, "Well, the Lion is rather touching. He is very trustful, just as in the true story."

The true story that started off the Happy Lion series took place in Avignon, France, where the Duvoisins were visiting. Mrs. Duvoisin happened on a newspaper account of a lion who had escaped from a circus. The town was in an uproar though the only creature who seemed to have suffered by the escape was the lion itself. When the trainer took the lion back to its cage, the creature was a nervous wreck from its encounter with townspeople. "My wife thought the lion was touching," Mr. Duvoisin said. "He

seemed so well-fed and friendly." A Gallic shrug. "Who knows what a lion thinks?"

The texts of the Happy Lion books are written by Mrs. Duvoisin in French. "Then it goes to Roger, and that's where the fight starts. When the picture is forward in his mind, I have to change the text to fit. Roger then translates the story into English. Later we translate the story back for the French market."

"You know," Mr. Duvoisin said, "though my wife writes in French, the books are very popular in Germany, but not in France. Maybe the stories are too sentimental for France. The Latin countries have always been behind the Northern in children's books. I think in France children are regarded as temporary. Interesting things who will soon be grownups. Maybe it is also because French schools use only textbooks. They do not have school libraries where children can get the habit of picture books. Our books are mostly in bookstores."

IN its issue of February 12, 1962, *Publishers' Weekly*, the industry's trade magazine, noted: "As the books progress, the Happy Lion is drawn to show his growing maturity. He is now bigger, heavier and has a slightly more solemn expression. The little boy who has been his friend throughout the books is also portrayed as being taller and closer to adolescence."

Mr. Duvoisin says this has changed. "We have realized that everything must be kept the same. The boy has stopped growing older. The problem is that we don't stop. The Happy Lion has had a cub but he [the H.L.] won't grow up."

Mrs. Duvoisin nodded. "Ah," she said sadly, "the cub has been given away and will not be heard from again. This is life."

A recent critic of the Duvoisin work is their granddaughter Anne. "She is now twelve," Mrs. Duvoisin said, "and she has been very helpful to us in the last two or three years. One Happy Lion book was put away when she pointed out that the Lion wasn't really doing anything in the story. Anne writes, too. She says she writes children's books because she is a child, but when she grows up she will write adult books."

The last question asked as the Duvoisins stood up to leave was: "Counting the new book, exactly how many Happy Lion books are there?"

The Duvoisins went into conference