THE SCOURGE OF THE POLITICIANS

THE CECIL KING DIARY 1965-1970. Jonathan Cape. 353 pp. $9.80.

Reviewer: CAMERON HAZLEHURST.

ALMOST without exception, the authors of published diaries tell us in their introductory paragraphs that they kept their journals with no thought of posterity, still less of seeing them in print.

Mr Cecil King, the former chairman of the International Publishing Corporation, is typical of that large group of diarists who seek to persuade their readers that they wrote, as he puts it, "out of interest and with no thought of publication".

It is asking too much of our credulity to expect us to believe such a statement by a man who has already published volumes of autobiography and voluminous extracts from earlier diaries.

Indeed, King's World War II diary was being edited for publication at the same time as he was writing the later entries in the present volume.

One might be tempted to think that the intentions of the diarist are unimportant — that one should simply examine what he has written and judge it as a record of events through which he lived. But this would be a mistake. For the act of publication — especially of a primarily political journal — is in itself a political act.

In offering a day-by-day account that purports to record the recent opinions of ministers, civil servants, directors of public corporations, and other figures holding positions of authority and influence, the writer is unavoidably affecting public perceptions and attitudes.

When this book originally appeared in Britain a great deal of ink was wasted in protests that its reports of conversations constituted a deplorable invasion of privacy. How monstrous it was, spluttered the arm-chair critics in their letters to The Times, that a man could not talk to a friend or acquaintance at his club or to a dinner party without the possibility that his every remark would be committed to paper shortly afterwards.

In fact, there is nothing new about what Cecil King has done. The shelves of London clubs are littered with books that provoked expostulation over revelations that seemed immensely important 50 years ago.

As newspapers and magazines battle for circulation, the delay between the writing and the publication of diaries becomes shorter and shorter. (The consummation of this process is the charming fiction that enables Woman's Day to publish Mrs Whitlam's weekly contribution to open government under the somewhat improbable title, "Margaret Whitlam's Private Diary").

The fact is that any person in public life must now expect that whenever and wherever he opens his mouth one or more of his audience may be taking a permanent note of what is uttered.

Anyone who fears that what he says may reach unintended audiences should keep his mouth shut. Most politicians have learnt to be prudent in the company of journalists. And we should not jump too quickly to the conclusion that, because ex-ministers in the Wilson government denied the accuracy of parts of Cecil King's diary, that they were taken by surprise by its publication.

Nor, for that matter, should we assume that because a story is denied it is untrue. Cecil King was believed to be a man of considerable influence. The support of his newspapers was sought both for the common purposes of the Government and for the individual aspirations of its members.

So we must judge the King diary from two main perspectives: as an instrument in the furtherance of the author's ambitions, and as a historical document. It is, of course, difficult to speak with certainty about King's intentions. But it is possible to make inferences from the content of the published portion of the diaries.

The overwhelming impression to be derived from King's remarks is his contempt for most politicians, especially Labour politicians.

We know from King's war diary that he thought Clem Attlee was "a man of limited intelligence and no personality". Of Churchill, he wrote that "his vanity and conceit are evidently quite impenetrable"

King's judgments of contemporary political leaders are equally severe. Lyndon Johnson he found "out of his depth", Harold Wilson was "an even worse P.M. than Alec Home — difficult as that was". James Callaghan was conceded to be honest and likable while lacking "much brain-power".

There are a few faint words of praise for Richard Marsh and Denis Healey on the Labour side And William Whitelaw, who now wrestles so desperately with the Irish situation, is described as "far more realistic to talk to than any other politician I know".

King often talked in the 1960s of the need to bring into government men with business and administrative experience. His name was linked with the plans of Lord Robens for a Businessman's Government.

Edward Heath, believing that his hour was approaching, requested King's advice in February 1969:

"He asked me who I thought the ablest industrialists and we ran over all the obvious names, but I pointed out that we were desperately short of administrative talent in industry, the civil service, and the Government. So, he said, taking able men out of industry would be robbing Peter to pay Paul? I said to a large extent this was so."

Nowhere does he say it explicitly, but the real message of King's denigration of almost everyone he meets, is that he alone has the knowledge, judgment and temperament to govern.

Throughout the Wilson ministry, King sat on the sidelines seething with frustration. As a part-time director of the Bank of England he had access to fragments of the highest level of financial information. As the occasional confidant of handful of Wilson's colleagues, he was given just enough facts to be dangerously ill-informed.

Rapidly despairing of ever achieving the place at the premier's right hand which he felt he deserved, he turned increasingly to Edward Heath. The Tory leader was fed secret Bank of England foreign exchange figures. He was even tipped off about the date of the 1966 general election soon after Wilson had given it to King in confidence. Heath, too, was to be a disappointment.

"He has no understanding of politics or public opinion", King wrote in December 1968, "but then that is true of most politicians these days".

King proclaims that politics is too important to be left to the politicians. He deplores the declining efficiency and prestige of parliamentary institutions. But he offers no constructive alternatives. His own book merely swells that stream of uncomprehending criticism and personal abuse that most undermines the vestigial credibility of existing constitutional arrangements.

Considered as a piece of documentary evidence about the 1960s, King's testimony can only be provisionally assessed. Some of his stories have been challenged by other eye-witnesses. A few are so dull that they are probably accurate, although certainly partial. Others are so absurd as to be manifestly true

Best of all, is the bewildered account of King's dismissal as chief executive of IPC. Believing himself superior in commercial as well as political wisdom, he felt indispensable to his business, even at the age of 67. His colleagues thought otherwise and ousted him without warning. King comforted himself with the bundle of offers for his memoirs from radio, te'evision, press and publishing.

"It seems", he confided prophetically to himself, "I shall be in the public eye for quite a while yet".

H. E. BATES AS POPULAR AND LITERARY AUTHOR

WRITERS' WORLD

By MAURICE DUNLEVY

H. E. BATES is a name that you hear little of in higher literary circles these days, although it is still magic to tens of thousands of ordinary readers.

Bates, however, was not always the darling of the common reader. In the 1930s and 1940s he was a writer for the connoisseur. No survey of modern English literature dare omit at least a mention of his name, no anthology of stories dare go to print without one of his tales. Even as late as the 1950s his novel, 'The Jacaranda Tree', was studied in university Eng Lit courses. Bates was a man of mark, not a writer of the front rank, but nevertheless one to be reckoned with.

Then came the angry young men and the new social realism and the critics had little time for a rural writer, a prose lyricist, even one who had turned his hand to writing about the war and Burma.

The trouble with Bates is that he outlived his own literary era, then had the cheek to become a bestselling novelist, and ended up by unabashedly pandering to his public in a period in which British reviewing was still conducted in the twilight of romantic aesthetics. As a man of letters he was dead; as a man of money he was made.

Today higher literary circles label him as the author of those rubbishy Rabelaisian books about the Larkins family, 'The Darling Buds of May', 'When the Green Woods Laugh' and 'A Breath of French Air'.

His devotion to the form comes through strongly in his autobiography, the third volume of which has just been published ('The Vanished World', 'The Blossoming World', 'The World in Ripeness', Michael Joseph, $6.20, $6.90, $9.50).

As any reader of his stories could have guessed, Bates was a provincial boy and is a countryman. He grew up in the boot-making village of Rushden, Northamptonshire, fell in love with the English countryside as a boy, and spent most of his adult life in a converted granary in Kent.

He came from a working class family, had little education, a strict Methodist upbringing and an early ambition to be a writer. In fact he conceived his ambition so early that the second volume of his autobiography opens with his going up to London in 1926 at the age of 20 to discuss the publication of his first novel, 'The Two Sisters', with Jonathan Cape.

To place Bates properly in the stream of twentieth century English literature you have to read 'The Two Sisters' which is still in print after 47 years. The book is mainly Conrad and water but already there is evidence of that sensuous feeling for the physical world that came to mark everything Bates wrote. There are also some fine examples of his lyrical prose and of his ability to create mood and atmosphere.

When Cape's reader, Edward Garnett, recognised the talent displayed in 'The Two Sisters' the 20-year-old author went on writing elatedly but after working for a year on another novel and having Garnett reject it he was brought back to earth.

Bates then turned to the short story and it has always remained his great love.

Reading those early stories today (collected in 'Day's End') it is difficult to understand why they attracted so much praise. The best of them rely on the poetic evocation of atmosphere, but few are more than sketches.

Nevertheless they were the beginning of a brilliant career as a short story writer. When the Readers' Union published 30 of his best stories in 'Country Tales' in 1938 the collection included such pieces as 'The Black Boxer', 'The Woman Who Had Imagination', 'Sally Go Round the Moon', 'The Mill', 'The Station', 'The House with the Apricot', 'The Kimono' and 'Breeze Anstey' — a group of stories that might be the envy of any other English short story writer of his time.

Some of the critics probably gave them added status because of the circumstances in which they were produced. As a freelance writer relying largely on magazines, Bates had to live for long periods on as little as £2 a week. He says he often wrote a story before lunch, an article in the afternoon, and a review before bed. At the same time he was producing those novels of rural England that established his reputation among connoisseurs of fine prose but earned him little as a connoisseur of hard cash: 'The Fallow Land' and 'The Poacher'.

His first commercial success came only in 1938 when 'Spella Ho' was reprinted three times within a year and was sold to the Atlantic Monthly for $5,000.

When war came he seemed to be on the way to comfort and security. He had published more than 200 short stories and seven novels. He at last was reaching a fairly wide but discriminating audience. But then he could no longer concentrate on fiction. He spent the first year of the war writing a critical survey, 'The Modern Short Story', which is still the best book in its field.

Then he got one of the strangest commissions of World War II. The RAF recruited him at the age of 36 as a short story writer and sent him off to a bomber base to write fiction about the Battle of Britain pilots.

It was then that he discovered that he could reach a popular audience by tailoring his fiction to its needs (although he does not admit this in his autobiography). The tales he wrote were published in a popular newspaper, the News Chronicle, and exploited the popular sentiments and popular propaganda of the time. They are still in print (embarrassingly I would think) under the pseudonym he used at the time, Flying Officer X.

This experience, however, led to another that produced one of his best novellas, an exciting escape story, 'Fair Stood the Wind for France', which was a best-seller then and continues to sell well today, almost 30 years later.

Then fortune took another favourable turn. In January 1945 the RAF sent Bates to Burma. Out of this experience he wrote 'The Purple Plain' and 'The Jacaranda Tree', best-sellers which even found favour with some of the snootier critics.

I'm no great admirer of most of Bates's novels but these two and 'Love for Lydia', the autobiographical love story he wrote in the 1950s, are still worth reading today.

Fortunately for the short story and the novella Bates became disillusioned with the novel after even his friends criticised the synthetic lyricism of 'The Sleepless Moon' and so he turned in the mid-1950s to the novella. "The novella won't sell", said his publishers, but by then Bates had the Midas touch and 'The Nature of Love', that collection of three novellas which have still lost none of their poetry, also became a best-seller and even today almost every new collection of his novellas or short stories goes automatically into paperback. People will still read stories by Bates while they ignore the short story in general, perhaps because they bring together the two main streams of the modern short story. They mix the strong narrative line that Maupassant contributed with the poetry that Chekhov, Turgeney and Gorky brought to it. In a time when magazine fiction competes with television narrative must assume a new importance.

Bates has come full circle from the early period of Chekhovian lyricism to the later period in which he also displays all the storytelling tricks of Maupassant. Moreover his early philosophy of art, which was a kind of art for art's sake approach to the short story, has come round to one which he sums up as "It is the business of the artist to entertain, not to instruct, to give pleasure, not to preach morals".

Unfamiliar to most Australians is this cuscus photographed on a tree branch. The cuscus inhabits the rainforests of North Queensland and New Guinea. The picture is reproduced from among the many fine plates in 'Australian Marsupials and Other Native Mammals', by Michael Morcombe (Lansdowne, 98pp, £5.95). The photographs are complemented by informative text and cataloging of species.

A GULF IN IDEAS

THE INDIA WE LEFT. By Humphrey Trevelyan. Macmillan. 255 pp. $12.50.

Reviewer: S. A. A. RIZVI

WHILE the impact of the modern industrial age is increasingly tending to bridge the gulf between British and Indians, both sides still have a long way to go towards complete mutual understanding.

Britain's political and economic superiority has not been the only factor responsible for the persistence of an unfavourable climate; the main reason has been the failure of the average Englishman to understand the Indian temperament.

One of the concluding remarks in the book under review correctly reflects the fallacy of a common British attitude as far as India was concerned:

"We failed to leave India in unity, but in this crisis of affairs there was no solution except partition. The knot had to be cut. When the first terrible pains of partition were overcome, the old prophecies that we should be succeeded by chaos, not a rupee or a virgin left, which few of us in India had believed, were proved false. Two armies were made from one; the princes lost their powers and their States were swallowed up; but apart from the dislocations and personal distress resulting from partition and the disturbing enmity of the two new States, life in most of India went on much as before". (p 245).

The first of the two subjects dealt with in this book is the Indian career of the author's uncle, Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan, from 1826 to 1865; the second is his own life in India from 1929 to 1947.

The career of Sir Charles spanned two different phases of British rule in India: East India Company rule before 1858, and direct control by the British Crown after that date. This work shows that the bribery and corruption of which East India Company officers were accused in the eighteenth century was in fact still rampant as late as 1827, when the young Charles Trevelyan became assistant to Sir Edward Colebrooke, the British Resident in Delhi.

Colebrooke was dismissed from the Residency, and subsequently from the service, as a result of Trevelyan's reformist enthusiasm. This incident demonstrated not only Trevelyan's fearlessness, but also the imagination and enterprise which was to be the typical trait of his fellow-countrymen in India.

His support of the efforts of his brother-in-law, Lord Macaulay, to establish English education in India resulted mainly from his reformist zeal and not from any family relationship. Humphrey Trevelyan, besides lamenting their neglect of Indian languages, does not agree with their extremist views:

"Trevelyan wrote that Hinduism was so entirely destitute of evidence and was identified with so many gross immoralities and physical absurdities that it must give way at once before the light of European science. As the change wrought by the new education advanced, India would become quite another country. Nothing more would be heard of excitable religious feelings and priestcraft would no longer be able to work by ignorance. How wrong they were. We can understand how the reformers were blinded by their faith in the superiority of their own religion and way of life, and how they failed to understand the qualities of Hindu thought and the deep roots of Hinduism in the life of most Indians". (p 53).

An interesting account is given of the "Echoes of the Mutiny" and the popular revolt associated with it, in Britain, and the repercussions in the British mind is touched upon in various contexts.

In Humphrey Trevelyan's own story can be found reflected the attitudes of the last generation of British officials in India.

By this time competitive examinations had increased Indian representation in the cadre of the Indian Civil Service, so highly praised for its efficiency and loyalty to the master. What Lord Trevelyan says of Madras was equally true of elsewhere in India, as when, for instance, he writes of the barriers between Indians and the British community as follows:

"It was a petty, narrow community, based on official position and colour, the most rigid defenders of the social barriers being the families of mixed descent or with generations of life in India who had lost their English roots and who, in order to conceal their own Indian origins or associations, despised everything Indian and asserted their rights as members of an exclusive caste". (p 119).

Life in the political service, as described by Lord Trevelyan, is romantic and exciting, and his account is a useful document, coming as it does from one who was charged with safeguarding British paramountcy in the various native States he had to keep an eye on without interfering in internal administration. Describing the fall of the princes after Indian independence he rightly observes:

"The States in their new form were, in a sense, a British creation. They were not a portion of the Old India which had remained untouched by British power. Though many could boast a long and distinguished history, for over a century they were an integral part of British rule".

This work as a whole should prove interesting and informative for the general reader; and the specialist might find useful Lord Trevelyan's account of his own career.

TALES FOR TEENAGERS

A PATTERN OF ROSES. By K. M. Peyton. Oxford University Press. 132 pp. $3.95.

THE SUMMER PEOPLE. By John Rowe Townsend. Oxford University Press. 160pp. $5.10.

Reviewer: JEAN RANGECROFT

YOU take a perfectly normal 16-year-old, would-be dropout called Tim Ingram, and make him the hero of a book for young teenagers.

You give him a pair of ambitious, materialistic parents to rebel against, and an acute insight into their failings. You also give him intelligence, bags of what they used to call soul, a certain artistic talent, and a readiness to believe in the supernatural, especially when God and the Church are left out of it.

There he is, endowed with every asset known to modern youth — and you know he's modern by all the talk of pollution study projects — all he can say by way of exclamation at his good fortune is the chaste but positively archaic "Cripes". It may have done for Billy Bunter, but surely not for a youth of today, however callow.

In spite of this small but persistent annoyance, 'A Pattern of Roses' is a more than passable book, and even contains some quite moving episodes. Tim's story is successfully woven in with that of Tom Inskip, a boy whose premature death in 1910 provides the element of mystery in the book. While searching for the solution to this mystery, Tim also finds the necessary determination to reject his parents' values in practical terms as well as in theory. He is helped by a girl who is described in the blurb as "the wilful red-haired Rebecca". Don't let that put you off, though. She's really quite human.

There is enough depth in Mrs Peyton's treatment of her characters to make them credible and interesting and easy to identify with. If you can bear with the "cripeses" and not be too sceptical about the power of Tom's influence from beyond the grave, you will find this book hard to put down.

'The Summer People' is a story for the same age group about a brief and for the most part uninspiring love affair between two 16-year-olds. The narrator is Philip Martin, a man of 49, who recalls this episode in his life in an extended letter to the mysterious Stephen and Carolyn, whose unexplained identities do at least make one keen to know the outcome of the story and just where they fit into it.

The style of the book is very off-putting. It is in the present tense, which seems unnatural, and can be extremely stiff and stilted. There are numerous references to the outbreak of World War II but they seem to have been imposed on the story simply to situate it in time, and have no real relevance to it.

The boy and the girl are horribly much in control of their emotions, their bodies, and the situation, and are too ready to accept that their relationship will not last.

For all these drawbacks, the book is still worth reading. There are moments when the author manages to crystallise a feeling, a thought or an atmosphere into something incredibly poignant; when his observations on life and love are so acute and perceptive that one can only stand amazed at their accuracy, and at the tender way in which they are expressed.

Sonnets

ALLEN and Unwin have reprinted Humbert Wolfe's translation of Ronsard's 'Sonnets for Helen' ($12.20).

Although this series of French sonnets was in influential book both in France and in England in the sixteenth century and is still one of the most beautiful sequences of sonnets in any language, the Wolfe translation has been out of print since the 1930s.

AN ARTY PARTY

A PALACE OF ART. By J. I. M. Stewart, Gollancz. 255pp. $5.10.

Reviewer: HOPE HEWITT

ON Page 46 of Mr Stewart's new novel Mrs Montacute, owner of a priceless collection of art, falls down dead in the middle of one of her arty parties. Inevitably the reader turns back to the title-page to see whether he hasn't picked up something by Michael Innes.

But no, it is Mr Stewart all right, for the emphasis is on the art collection and not on the dead Mrs M, who in fact died from humdrum and natural causes. But then the Stewart and the Innes territory have always tended to overlap: Inspector Appleby, the Innes Private Eye, is an expert in thuggery among the Great Masters and can handy quotations from Donne with any Oxbridge don. And the Stewart novels run to crime or mystery among the connoisseurs, while the shadow of the Eng. Lit. Dept. syllabus hangs heavily over both of them.

It is the ghost of Henry James which haunts this novel, especially the James of 'The Spoils of Poynton'. For the Montacute collection is housed in the stately home of Nudd (Mr Stewart does enjoy himself producing parodied names) and is displayed with such exquisite taste that the culture-vultures who close in at the death agree that it would be aesthetically criminal to break up the association of house and contents. Indeed late in the book the author decides he had better forestall the comparison and has the similarity occur to his conservative lawyer who "was probably addicted to reading Victorian novels, in which great houses fairly regularly go up in flames in the last chapter".

Nothing so spectacular happens to this Palace of Art. The book's excitement such as it is, is a variation on the James/Innes/Stewart pattern; it is not who did the murder or who stole the masterpiece but who will get the heiress? For the inheritor of the Nudd collection is Gloria Montacute, a most unJamesian girl, generously built, distinctly philistine in matters of art and in spite of her expensive education unable to drop quotations from Keats or Shakespeare or produce a suitable Latin tag.

She is pursued from various motives by three young men and finds it as difficult to decide about them as about their feelings for her (apart from the Nudd collection). It is only when in the company of one of them she is exposed to Op Art for the first time that she realises the genuineness of this particular suitor. Under the influence of love she even manages to cap a quotation — it is only from Kipling but at least it is a start.

Mr Stewart settles the fate of his heavyweight heroine to the satisfaction of both romance and satire. But clearly he moves with less ease in the contemporary world that in the rarefied atmosphere of universities or in the never-never land of culture. Wisely he transports his characters to Venice for part of the story. Only here or in the stately seclusion of Nudd can one really accept a young art expert called Octavius Chevalley who can place a School of Giorgione at a glance or a family solicitor called Thurkle who uses words like "educe" or "apprise": not to mention the Montacute cousins who are called Counterpayne, an art dealer called Lambert Domberg and a butler called Guise who is succumbing to illusions of grandeur among the art objects.

At times the author drags his reader protesting into the 1970s by mentioning pollution, four-letter words and permissive sex. But for the most part this creation follows the old formula and will appeal to those with a taste for Stewart elitist fare.