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TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

"A play that it is useless to describe. To say that it depicts the victory of hope and the belief that civilisation has still a dog's chance over the certainty that it hasn't, is to give the vaguest and crudest indication of the author's purpose. *Thunder Rock* has just been published by Hamish Hamilton, at 5s. My advice would be, see the play, then read the book, then see the play again. Or book-play-book if you prefer."

SPECTATOR

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HAMISH HAMILTON

home. Then there was a Lord Savername, known as Lord Stomach-ache, who married "The Marchioness Dorothy, nee Tester, late of the refreshment department of the Theatre Royal, Brighton"; at the wedding Lord Stomach-ache described himself as a cab-proprietor and dressed the part in "a bird's-eye blue belcher, a drab box-cloth coat with large mother o' pearl buttons, and a coachman's hat." And lastly John Portage who "while preaching fell into a trance and rushed out of the church and went to his house where he found his wife clothed all in white lawn with a rod in her hand. Ten other women came in and all fell to dancing the Hays about the flower pots." Mr. Roberts might have mentioned Portage's son, Samuel, an accomplished poet, although he is now remembered only as "lame Mephibosheth" in *Absalom and Achitophel*. DESMOND HAWKINS

SAHIBS OR SOCIALISTS ?

Barbarians and Philistines: Democracy and the Public Schools. By T. C. WORSLEY. *Hale*, 10s. 6d.

The public schools have been under fire from the Left for a considerable time and in recent years the attacks have grown in number and intensity. The most successful offensive has often come from a schoolmaster who, like Mr. Pekin, has crossed over from the public to the progressive school. Such critics have, however, always been open to the facile, but to many people convincing, retort that the progressive schoolmaster is a crank. Mr. Worsley cannot be dismissed upon these grounds; he was a public schoolboy and a public schoolmaster, and he is aware both of the merits and defects of the progressive school embedded in a public school system. He has written an admirable book, and one hopes against hope that, even with the Nazi sitting on the doorstep of our island fortress, it will get the attention that it deserves. It is a devastating study and analysis, not only of our public schools, but our whole educational system, and it has the great merit of being constructive as well as destructive. Every democrat and Socialist who still believes that after defeating Hitler we must undertake the even harder battle of conquering ourselves, should read the last part of Mr. Worsley's book. It contains the outlines of an educational system for the future and the place of the public schools in it. It is admittedly only a sketch, but Mr. Worsley's experience and practical intelligence make it extremely valuable. One can say, dogmatically but safely, that if our school system is not remodelled after the war much on his lines, even though we have beaten Hitler, we shall again have lost a war for democracy.

Mr. Worsley begins by showing what was the aetiology of the public school of the last part of the nineteenth century. This accounts for the title of his book. For he adopts Matthew Arnold's distinction between the aristocratic class which in Britain is barbarian, and the middle class which is philistine. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the public schools were purely barbarian. The industrial revolution caused a struggle between the barbarians and philistines for power and, like most British struggles, it ended in a compromise—the two classes merged into one. The public school, the instrument of education for the merged classes, has to this day retained the marks of that compromise, and in the hands of Arnold of Rugby and Thring of Uppingham their crude barbarism was overlaid with a thick covering of bourgeois respectability and Christianity. Mr. Worsley gives a fascinating description of the gradual development of the modern public school system by means of a series of quotations from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to *Stalkey & Co., The Hill, and The Lighter Side of School Life*. But the social form of a social institution is ultimately determined by its social function, and

in the class society of the latter days of the nineteenth century the function of the public school was to train the young of the dominant classes to exercise power in a society built upon an economic and social hierarchy of classes. It did this with outstanding success. The public school system was and still is one of the strongest bulwarks against the growth of democracy, and even more against the growth of democratic Socialism. Mr. Worsley insists upon its authoritarian basis and its close connection with imperialism; his demonstration of its resemblance to the Nazi system and the *Führerprinzip* will shock and enrage many people. His demonstration may be just a little one-sided, for it does not allow quite enough place for other strands in the British social tradition, but there is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in what he says. (It is an interesting fact, which has escaped even Mr. Worsley's notice, that Kipling, the most distinguished advocate of the public school as a breeder of little Führers, thirty years before Hitler realised the significance of the swastika as an emblem, for in his collected edition opposite every title page there is a reproduction of his autograph within a circle and surmounted by a swastika.)

Mr. Worsley is right in diagnosing the Boer War as a turning point in the history of Britain and the Empire. Up to that time the public school performed successfully a function which was relevant to the whole context of British society. After 1900 it was nothing but an anachronism. The Kiplingesque barbarian-philistine adolescent who developed into the Kiplingesque subaltern and empire-builder and ultimately into the Tory clubman, was totally incompetent to deal with a world dominated by large-scale industry, machines, mathematical formulae, and totalitarian States. In this new world he was neither a sahib nor a Socialist, but the world demanded inexorably that he should make up his mind to be either the one or the other. The sahib of the new world is a Nazi, a Fascist, or a Communist; the Socialist of the new world, if he is not to enter their camp, must combine Socialism with uncompromising democracy, and the war which we are now fighting, if it is not fought for democratic Socialism against sahibism, will prove to be as meaningless as the previous one. But one only has to state these truisms to see that the public school and the public schoolboy are anachronisms which have fallen between the two stools.

LEONARD WOOLF

NEW NOVELS

Moment in Peking. By LIN YUTANG. *Heinemann*. 15s.

Trouble in July. By ERSKINE CALDWELL. *Cape*. 7s. 6d.

Country Tales. By H. E. BATES. *Cape*. 7s. 6d.

Great Powers export their culture as well as their machine tools, and hence are usually somewhat self-satisfied about their own literary products; yet even England has repeatedly succumbed to the glamour of the foreign label. On the whole, however, despite occasional fads for Hindu metaphysics or Slavonic folk tales, the Western intelligentsia have imported their culture only from each other, and have been fairly fitted to criticise another's literature because, like their cooking, it is based on the same ingredients. For Eastern countries the situation has been far different. In most spheres that could be pragmatically tested—in war, in science, in organisation—the West had a patent advantage, and the Oriental intellectual consequently assumed that European art and culture must be as superior as its railway engines. Lin Chin-nan's translations of Conan Doyle and Sir Walter Scott thrilled young China as the breath of a higher society, and blew down respect for

the subtle complexities of the great classics as surely as the British cannon had blasted down the carved and crenellated walls of old Peking.

Moment in Peking is a carefully written and closely woven narrative of the Westernisation of China. The story begins with the Boxer rising, the first serious reaction against European influence, follows the increasing turmoil of the Regency, the Republic and the anarchic reign of the war lords, and ends with the invasion of the Japanese and the great retreat from the old cities of the North to the precarious new civilisation building itself up in the interior. Mr. Lin Yutang is not primarily concerned with political or social changes, but indicates their effects upon a small group of wealthy families, and illustrates the impact of the new outlook by the gradual changes in their cultivated personal relationships. There are no flamboyant set pieces, but an almost exaggerated understatement—the difficulties of relations with a son's concubine are given as much weight as invasion, rape and murder—and the author writes in a convention of restraint that forbids both the tricks and the grandeurs of the European novel. Yet, nevertheless, the book has a taste of the epic about it, and an intensity of feeling that its urbanity of style accentuates rather than conceals. Except on inessentials, Mr. Lin Yutang carefully refrains from comment upon the decline and fall (or, if you like, the growth and rise) of the culture he describes. At the beginning, girls kneel before their aunts and children exchange classical aphorisms; by the end, there are tennis parties, mission schools and detective stories; at the beginning, there is slavery and decapitation, at the end, there are democrats in bombing planes. China itself still retains much of its old shape; it still names its mountains after ancient poets, and still calls a dish of chicken and sausages "Famous Scholar's Abandon." Will it adapt

itself within the framework of its old ideas? Will it re-name baked beans "First-class Technician's Evening Off," and find new classics to replace the old, or will it follow the pattern to the full conclusion and become as similar to Europe as Provence is to Picardy? Mr. Yutang offers no opinion, but his book, the only one of its kind by a Chinese cosmopolitan that I have encountered, gives ample material for those who wish to form one.

Mr. Caldwell enjoys a triple distinction that any writer would envy. Not only is he respected by the critics as a stylist and admired by the Left Wing as a fearless radical; he is also revered as the author of a play, still running in New York, that has beaten the record of *Chu Chin Chow* by a good many performances. He is that remarkable figure, as rare and priceless as the phoenix, the highbrow six-figure best-seller. *Trouble in July*, however, is by no means of his usual high standard, and, were not such a thing so patently absurd, might be suspected of being a pot-boiler. The plot—an innocent negro, a nymphomaniac white gal, a puzzled, well-meaning sheriff, a horrid lynching—is an old favourite, and the style, generally, is that familiar one redolent of blood, sweat, and whip-leather, of which the author is such a master. Unfortunately, Mr. Caldwell seems unable to keep it up. We have the usual rich stuff ("Sheriff Jeff McCurtain was knee-deep and belly-floundered in a patch of rank pigweed when dawn broke"), and are treated to a rape and several atrocities, but in between times there are attempts to pad out the story by imitation Hemingway, and pointless pages are devoted to accounts of the Sheriff putting on his trousers or wondering whether to answer the phone. The trouble, I believe, is that Mr. Caldwell has written his subject out. Even in the Southern States there are limits to man's inhumanity to man, and the repetition of similar

brutalities rapidly becomes as wearisome as the torments of Foxe's Martyrs. The psychology of oppression is, perhaps, an interesting study, but its simple execution, no matter how well described, loses its initial effects as quickly as alcohol, and has to be laid on in ever-increasing quantities to arouse the desired reaction. *Trouble in July* is grotesque, amusing and in parts horrifying, but it does nothing save narrate simple events without either analysis or explanation. It is a short novel, but somehow an empty one, and draws its vitality almost entirely from its horrors. It should—and may—mark the end of a stage in Mr. Caldwell's development.

Most people who are in the least interested in the short story know Mr. Bates's work, and need only be told that the thirty stories included in *Country Tales* are selected from his works of the last twelve years, and contain such old acquaintances as *The Black Boxer*, *The Mill*, and *The Kimono*. The interest of this collection is that it gives, so to speak, a bird's-eye cross-section of Mr. Bates's growing talent. He is preoccupied primarily with atmosphere, and even in those tales which have a definite plot, the narrative is allowed to slip into the background. Unlike most of the atmospheric school, however, he has a hard grasp of reality (perhaps preserved by his interest in country matters), and never, save in his first book, allows his detail to become hazy because his theme is undefined. His trick, or rather craft, is first to select and isolate a situation, and then to describe it precisely, so that his stories are rigidly restricted in scope and character but worked out with the utmost delicacy. His work, more than that of any other living English writer, approximates in spirit to the sonnet. It is confined in breadth and treatment, it can never be tragedy or epic, but it can, in its way, be perfect.

JOHN MAIR