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BOOKS OF THE YEAR—I

Chosen by Eminent Contemporaries

From EARL ATTLEE, K.G., O.M., C.H.

TWO books which have interested me particularly among this year's publications are Alan Moorehead's *Gallipoli* (Hamish Hamilton) and Sir William Slim's story of the Burma campaign *Defeat Into Victory* (Cassell); the first not only for its own qualities but also because for me, as an old Gallipoli man, it has a poignant interest.

Mr. Moorehead has to a very great degree managed to capture the spirit of that unfortunate adventure, though as an Australian he has perhaps concentrated too much on the Anzac show and dealt rather scantily with the work of other units. On the other hand, with the fuller knowledge that has come from access to what was happening on the other side of the hill, he has shown how near we came to success and pays a just tribute to Sir Winston Churchill's imaginative concept.

Sir William Slim has given a very fine account of the ebb and flow of the Burma campaign, a sidestory where improvisation often had to take the place of adequate supplies of men and materials. It is noteworthy, too, for the self-effacement which gives the credit to anyone else but himself, though it is clear to anyone who has served in war that it was his indomitable spirit which made eventual success possible.

It is seldom that a general is so willing to admit mistakes as in this book, without any attempt to put the blame on someone else, as often happens when men describe events, he has given unconsciously an admirable picture of himself.

From H. E. BATES

THE sight of shell-pink flowers of winter viburnum shining against brown oak leaves and a snowy blue give me, as I write these words, more pleasure than most of the books I have read in the year that is now ending.



H. E. Bates

Perhaps I shall, in fact, be the only author in this symposium to have to admit that as he grows older he reads less.

In youth reading was a matter of dedication, almost a disease. In middle age people, pictures, music, flowers and backgrounds interest and inspire me more than books, though flowers and words remain the only means by which I can express myself. I am even inclined to fancy I learn more from them, too.

But one book that provided both pleasure and an extension of knowledge in 1956 was Sir William Rothenstein's *Modern English Painters: Lewis to Moore* (Eyre & Spottiswoode). Good writing about painters is, especially in this country, a rare thing, and Rothenstein joins Sir Kenneth Clark as one of the few people who can write in recognisable and civilised idiom about a subject that normally attracts to it about as many barnacles of jargon as science or even music does.

From JOHN BETJEMAN

THERE are outstanding things about the novel *Morning*, by Julian Fane (Murray). It expresses the intense happiness of early childhood, and the sad bits are used only to heighten the moments of happiness. It is written in the sort of golden glow that one can remember from the happiest days before puberty. The style is simple, direct, and obviously the work of somebody who has spent a long time learning how to write really well, so that the effect of the story is seemingly effortless. Forgive the next three seeming rather churchy, but they happen to be the best books I have read lately:

The Towers of Trebizond, by Rose Macaulay (Collins). It has humour and love between people who cannot marry because of private scruples. There is no self-pity in it, and the book is a fine testament for the Church of England.

Old London Churches, by Elizabeth and Wayland Young (Faber). Here are two writers who can make architecture alive and interesting and who also relate their buildings to the past and to the present. The book is easy to understand, it makes you like buildings you have not looked at before, and it is marvelously free of technicalities and

In this special contribution some eminent contemporaries have chosen from the books of 1956 volumes which particularly interested them, adding, in one or two cases, titles of an earlier date. The second part of the survey is to appear next week.



Earl Attlee



Lord David Cecil



Lady Violet Bonham Carter



John Betjeman

fortunately full of humour without ever being facetious.

Rebuilding St. Paul's, by Jane Lang (Oxford). This is a fascinating history of the Church of England at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. It also shows the aesthetic perception of Charles II and the patience and goodness of Sir Christopher Wren and Dean Sancroft, and it is as exciting as a novel.

From LADY VIOLET BONHAM CARTER, D.B.E.

THIS year the book which has moved me more deeply than any other is Alan Moorehead's *Gallipoli* (Hamish Hamilton).

"Who was Gallipoli?" asked an intelligent girl, aged twenty, of her parents. For her generation this epic of courage, comradeship, shared peril and endurance, frustrated hopes and ultimate defeat is neither history nor experience.

For those who, like myself, lived through it, saw through the eyes and felt through the hearts of those who played a part in it, it remains the most poignant and memorable drama of the First World War.

Its story is incomparably told by Mr. Moorehead. He recognises Gallipoli for what it was—no "side-show" but the most imaginative strategic concept of the war with possibilities almost "beyond reckoning." If—in Sir Winston Churchill's words—"the terrible 'It's' accumulate." Had it succeeded the war might well have been shortened by three years, Russia might not have signed a separate peace and the Russian Revolution might not have followed. Gallipoli is one of history's most tragic Might-have-beens.

For all this might have been but for a disastrous tug-of-war between opposing personalities and pressures. As one reads it is difficult to believe that Mr. Moorehead was not himself

among the combatants—wading through icy seas to the assault upon the beaches, sharing the heat, the stench of death, the torment of the flies in trench and dug-out—sharing too in that mystical comradeship of "high spirits, fitness and integrity created by the powerful drug of risk." He becomes one of the men he writes about with such penetrating intimacy.

To these men, in spite of all they had endured and suffered, the order to evacuate sounded a knell. "Too much had been committed here, too many were dead to make it possible to go away. . . . The men came to their officers in hundreds and asked to be the last to leave the shore." What they minded most of all was leaving their dead friends behind them. "I hope," said one soldier to his officer, "I hope they won't hear us going down to the beaches."

In its truth, in its dramatic beauty and in its profound understanding of this heroic but ill-fated enterprise Mr. Moorehead's record is one of the greatest war books I have ever read.

No book, even by Miss Rose Macaulay, has given me more exquisite and pure delight than *The Towers of Trebizond* (Collins). To paraphrase Polonius—it is fantastical-mystical-historical-theological-tragical-comical-nomadic and zoological.

The heroine's High Anglicanism (of which she alleges that her taste for fishing is a symptom) is at odds with her inclination to indulge in interludes of adultery—a spade which she calls by its own name. She finds it difficult to establish peaceful co-existence between these two conflicting currents in her nature.

Her passion for foreign travel provides scope and opportunity for both, accompanied by an accomplished ape (picked up on voyage) she conducts a mission to Turkish women and stays at intervals with her illicit flame. She is disturbed, though not prevented, in

these doings by theological quandaries and by the sight of the symbolic Towers which are her spiritual goal but which must remain for ever "gated and walled" against her.

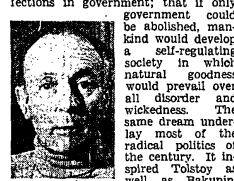
This enchanting book without a plot is a triumph of fantasy and wit and, above all, of sheer high spirits.

The most memorable book of the year, Sir Winston Churchill's *The New World* (Cassell), cannot be appraised within these limits. It is not only a revelation of the past, painted in new and glowing colours, but a self-revelation. Here we are given the unique opportunity of learning history from one who has made it.

From JOYCE CARY

THE first volume of Leon Edel's *Henry James, The Untried Years* (Hart-Davis) is one of the best books I have read this year.

What is delightful is the picture of Henry James's father, with his contemporary philosophy of life. Like so many idealists of his time he was convinced that all evil in the world was an accident due to various imperfections in government; that if only



Joyce Cary

government could be abolished, mankind would develop a self-regulating society in which natural goodness would prevail over all disorder and wickedness. The same dream underlay most of the radical politics of the century. It inspired Tolstoy as well as Bakunin, but in the States, for historical reasons, it had far wider acceptance than in Europe.

And how interesting to see this first Henry James's difficulty in deciding between Europe and America for the education of his family; his perpetual wobble between European and American ideals. When he is in America he is convinced that he must take advantage of European tradition and its rich associations; but as soon as he has established his sons and daughter at schools in Paris or Geneva, he begins to long for the American liveliness and ingenious freedom.

The whole book provides a fascinating commentary on the emotional differences between Europeans and Americans as they confronted a world in perpetual revolution; differences that still linger, even nowadays.

From LORD DAVID CECIL, C.H.

TWO books impressed me specially in 1956. The first, *Morning*, by Julian Fane (Murray), is a novel about childhood which combines an extraordinary, strong, fresh sense of reality with an unflinching sense of art: it is as though we looked out of the window to catch a glimpse of real people in a real garden, who happen for a moment to have fallen into a group orderly and harmonious as a well-composed picture. "Morning" is the most distinguished first novel I have read for several years.

My second choice, *Marianne Thornton*, by E. M. Forster (Arnold), is that rare phenomenon, a biography equally interesting for its subject and for its author. Miss Thornton, a delightful, sensible, humorous nineteenth-century lady, and a first-rate letter-writer, is presented to us by Mr. Forster, one of the most distinguished of living authors. Perhaps he does not do full justice to the religious side of his subject; but how lively and graceful is every page of his book!

I also derived great pleasure from *The River Steamer and Other Poems* by E. J. Scovell (Cresset Press). This is a collection of poems in which a sharp observation of Nature is conveyed with a delicate, imaginative sensibility that recalls the best Chinese painting.

From E. M. FORSTER, C.H.

OF the few 1956 books that I have read, J. R. Ackerley's *My Dog Tulp* (Secker & Warburg) is by far the most remarkable. It is a biography of the New Dog—a creature comparable to the New Woman who disturbed our grandparents. Tulp, the Alsatian bitch in question does not indeed demand a latch-key; I all doors and windows are left open, all traffic stopped when she crosses a road

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POETIC HERITAGE: 65

The Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

... See the God blasphemed and doubted
In the schools of Greece and Rome;
See the pow'rs of darkness routed,
Taken at their utmost gloom.
Nature's decorations glisten
Far above their usual trim;
Birds on box and laurel listen,
As so near the cherubs hymn.
Boreas now no longer winters
On the desolated coast;
Oaks no more are riv'n in splinters
By the whirlwind and his host.
Spinks and 'ouzes sing sublimely,
"We too have a Saviour born";
Whiter blossoms burst untimely
On the blest Mosaic thorn.
God all-bounteous, all-creative,
Whom no ills from good dissuade,
Is incarnate, and a native
Of the very world he made.

CHRISTOPHER SMART [1722-71]