

Commitment, cynics & charade

By ANTHONY QUINTON

THESE three works, respectively a play, an essay on committed writing and a novel, constitute a trilogy called *The Confrontation* with which David Caute, the author of three lively novels and a substantial study of Communism and the French intellectuals, launches a land, sea and air attack on the reading public.

I have listed them at the head of this review in the author's order of battle, but in fact I left the essay entitled *The Illusion* until last in reading, out of a wish to consider the practice in an unprejudiced way before immersing myself in the theory.

I am glad of this since the novel, *The Occupation*, seems to me not only much the best of these three works but also to exist in total and splendid defiance of the theory. The unity of these works is, indeed, pretty superficial.

All express the strong and definite personality of their author, which is a quite appealing mixture of ideologically formulated aggressiveness and intimate, even somewhat amorous, self-exposure. They are held together largely by the fact that "Steven Bright" is the central character of the play and novel and is also said to be the author of the essay.

But as he is an aesthetic fink of about 50 in the play and a 30-year-old agonised young man in the novel this connection does not amount to much. Many of the characters of the play and novel share names, but have different ages, nationalities, even colours.

In his rather hectic but stimulating essay, "The Illusion," Mr. Caute, through his staking-horse Steven Bright, says: "The committed radical must be a public writer." But not of the compound of bogus realism and didactic moralising of Marxist theory and Soviet practice.

Literature is a performance and should not try to pretend it is not. It can serve its ideological purpose all the better, and more honestly, if it uses the alienation technique applied by Brecht in the theatre and remotely anticipated by Cervantes, Fielding and Sterne with their conniving apostrophes to the Gentle Reader.

This dialectical procedure is Mr. Caute's concession to the innovations of modernism. Anything more would prejudice the ideological aim which remains paramount for him, in theory at any rate.

DAVID CAUTE, *The Demonstration*. Deutsch, £1-40.

DAVID CAUTE, *The Illusion*. Deutsch, £2-50.

DAVID CAUTE, *The Occupation*. Deutsch, £2.

The play, *The Demonstration*, stands in fairly close relation to its author's specifications. It has a public theme and takes the form of a charade or pageant in which the characters say the now rather desperately typical things which rebellious students and the gerontocrats of the "system" do say when engaged in a clash.

There is a judicious infusion of up-to-date theatrical devices: sudden changes of scene, catchwords and photographs flashed on a screen. But the thing stops well short of fashionable chaos: the audience are expected to remain in their seats and are assaulted only by the spoken word, delivered from the far side of the footlights. The nausea inspired in Mr. Caute by such enterprises as *Theatre La Mama* is vibrantly expressed in the essay.

Whatever its merits on the stage, it is a bit too stark and ritualised to make very satisfactory reading. Also a certain political sentimentality presents itself to the cold eye of the solitary reader. The student characters are all humane, decent, self-questioning individuals.

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DAVID CAUTE
Attack on the reading public.

apart from the fairly nasty lecturer who eggs them in. Their oppressive elders, by contrast, are cynical and calculating.

Furthermore, the student radicals are neatly exculpated from involvement in the drug culture, promiscuous orgies, etc., by the introduction of a repre-

sentative of this side of modern life. This is Marko, described in the stage directions as "a rich and shambling hippie". His groovy-baby dialect contrasts sharply with the earnest socialist monosyllables of the radical students.

The novel is an intensely passionate and subjective work. It has, despite its title, only the slenderest relation to the public events figuring in the play. The only students who do not occupying are in the tormented, fantasy-ridden brain of the central character. A visiting professor at a university in New York, he undergoes a general collapse of personality when the glamorous student with whom he has been having an affair drops him for a black teacher of political science.

Steven Bright's intimate problems are set out in vivid detail. Habits acquired during a boarding-school education have left him able to make love effectively only if his eyes are shut. In his misery he rents a projector and buys a blue film from an establishment in Times Square.

On the rare occasions when his sexual difficulties let up for a bit his main concerns seem to be his physical appearance, or whether he should have booked a table for an encounter that is meant to look casual. The ideological content of this work, or—which is much the same—of Steven Bright, is zero. At most, his off-stage commitment to the politics of the young is a weapon in his anxious struggle with the fear of becoming middle-aged.

Despite its mournful topic "The Occupation" is always interesting and often very funny. There is some excellent parody: of the bookish, self-educated style of an old socialist literary hack and of the coy, suburban gentility of the mental processes of Steven's girl. But it is an entirely personal novel about a private, and only accidentally political, human being.

Mr. Caute is not a careful writer. "A certain insularity prevails in the national bloodstream" is a not wholly untypical sentence. But he is an inexhaustibly fresh and lively one above all when he is seeking to show rather than to prove. I hope the elasticity of his literary doctrine will be great enough to allow him to go on writing about private life with the intense and passionate openness with which he is gifted.

CASUALTIES OF TIME

By JANICE ELLIOTT

GILLIAN TINDALL, *Fly Away Home*. Hodder, £1-90.

DAVID PRYCE-JONES, *Running Away*. Weidenfeld, £2.

JAMES A. MICHENER, *The Drifters*. Secker & Warburg, £2-75.

JOHN MAURICE, *The Divider*. Collins, £1-50.

GILLIAN TINDALL'S new novel, *Fly Away Home*, is enjoyable, perceptive, merciless and chilly.

Diary of a sane housewife, it presents, in journal form, the history and present troubles of Antonia Bouleau, who fled from a rotten childhood and the inevitability of a place at Oxford, to marry a nice Frenchman, ten years later, a nasty case of fragmented identity.

The kind of crisis anyone might face but intensified for this heroine by memories of a good kibbutz affair and the fact of exile. Agonies are survived and end in a convincing acceptance of life as she is lived.

A corny theme? But then life is corny and Miss Tindall, I suspect, knew very well what she was doing. If the recalled episode with a glamorous Moroccan kibbutznik seems romantic, then the disillusion with the rediscovered, middle-aged, respectable, lover-grown-up is all the sharper.

There are many good things in this book. On the light side, dry but affectionate observations upon the French who are, recognisably, "never just killed but are trampled, decapitated, even trepanned, with their addresses given in full." On a deeper level Miss Tindall's reactions, through Antonia, to marriage, human relationships in general and the themes of time's erosions and paradise loss are often profound, never less than intelligent.

And here's the rub, for the awkward truth is that a highly developed intelligence can sometimes inhibit creativity. It may be ungrateful to complain that a writer is simply too much in control of her material, but the fact remains that I was not moved. The diary form has, paradoxically, a distancing effect. And there seems to be behind this novel an intelligence too fastidious, too self-critical perhaps, to grapple with the real mess of life.

David Pryce-Jones is another author who prefers not to ride the galloping horse of intuition but presents some nice perceptions with great elegance. One of Miss Tindall's preoccupations—the price of escape—is the principal theme of his *Running Away*.

On the run here are Tanis and Anthony, children of a broken marriage, whose father, Freddy, bestows upon them the dubious gift of total freedom. Anthony, the tougher of the two, ends up as a kind of pirate set on plunder in the new glass and steel England. Tanis, the most touching, and real characterisation in the book, flees from her progressive boarding school to Israel and a relationship with a bad tempered young Moroccan (what a lot of Moroccan kibbutzniks there are this week).

But the kibbutz is just another progressive boarding school and turns out to be only the first stop on a long, inconclusive trail through a stifling marriage to another Moroccan, widowhood, motherhood and so on.

For all its stylishness, this is an uneven book. The constant changes of scene from one world flashpoint to another are confusing, fully justified only in one good passage in California; here Freddy, horrified by student demos, realises that "He and the children had lived by whim, and whim had disintegrated them." This illumination brings on a nervous collapse, convincing but only to a point, because Freddy has never been fully developed, and you have to build someone up before you break them down. Altogether this is a highly readable book, tastefully served, but more of a snack than a meal.

James A. Michener's *The Drifters*, by contrast, groaning free, 751 pages long, it chronicles first the origins and motives, then the wanderings together of six young people who are searching... exploring

ing... rejecting." By page 283 Mr. Michener has got them all together in Torremolinos. From here they take off on good trips and bad trips, both actual and chemically induced, finally to settle down, go on drifting or die of heroin, each to his taste.

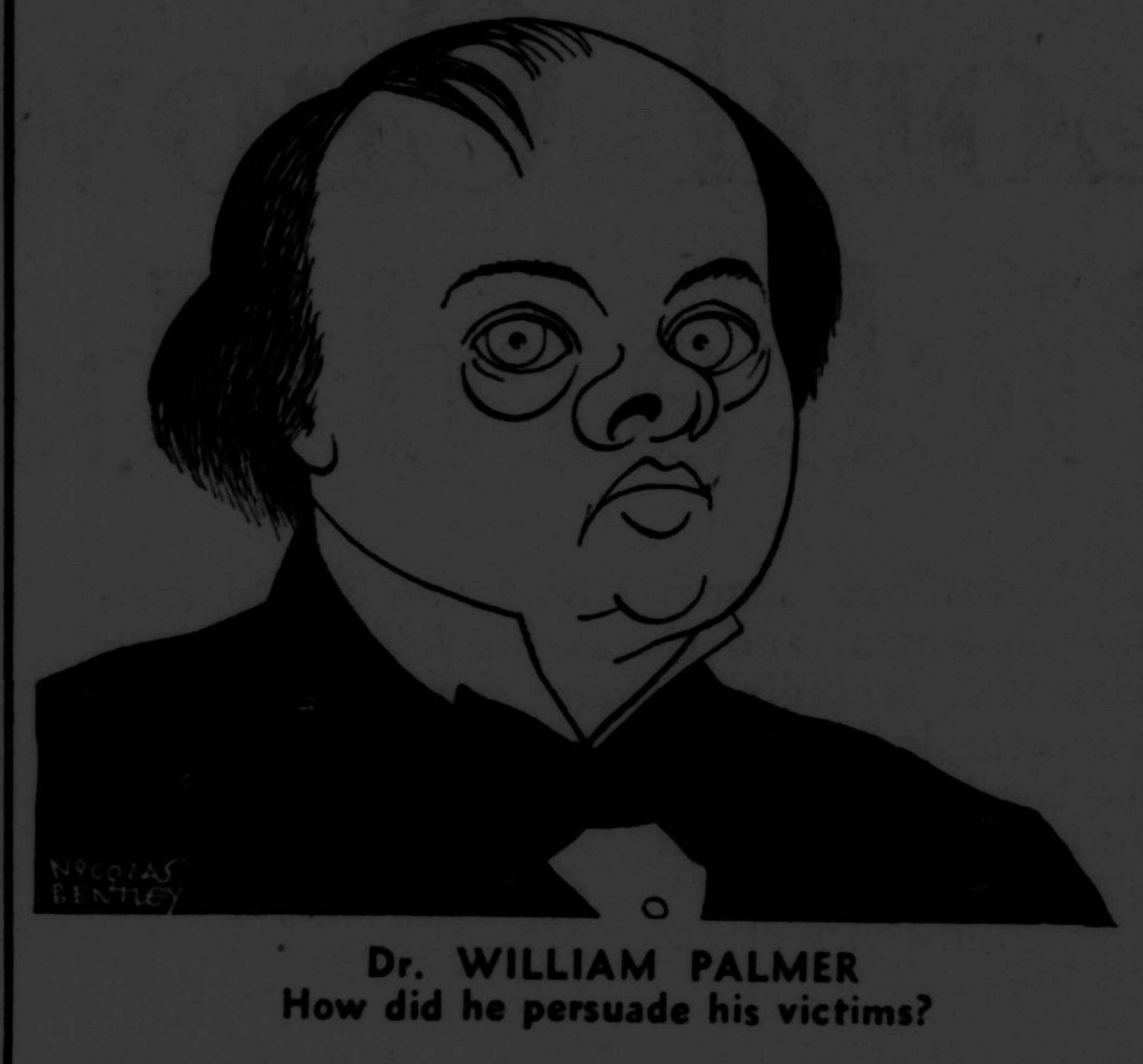
Against that famous sacred calf, The Young, many injustices have been perpetrated (not least the middle-aged habit of lumping them together as The Young). To be fair to Mr. Michener, he really has tried, through his sixtyish linking narrator, to be fair. He neither condemns nor entirely condones their goings-on and is painfully aware that there are plenty of adult drop-outs too: "the great silent minority that aspired to nothing."

Ironically, it is this older, gentile man who emerges as the only truly sympathetic character in an overstuffed book. The rest are puppets, twitching in obedience to predictable behavioural patterns. Yet bearing in mind that this novel or something like it was certain to be disgorged sooner or later by the American word-mill, one should be grateful that Mr. Michener got there first. At least he seems genuinely concerned, and he writes decent English.

First novels are frequently distinguished by the clash of symbols and John Maurice's *The Divider* is no exception. The theme is the Kafkaesque loss of identity of Anglo-Indian Jasim Sailer (or is he Jasim Sailer?), divided between darkness and light, his Bengali heritage and his yearning for Englishness. Labyrinthine, stuffed with red herrings and spiced with espionage, this intriguing, sometimes irritating story founders in the end on its own equivocations.

The first 60 pages, however—Jasim's Indian boyhood and marriage to a neurotic wife—are written on a realistic level and bode well for this author's future. "Once, in the deserted chapel, I had with exceptional temperidity crept under the white-clothed altar in search of God, finding only a dry, dusty smell that threatened to make me sneeze." This is a lovely moment, a poetic perception, and here, I would guess, rather than in symbolic sleight-of-hand, lies Mr. Maurice's true gift.

Fritz Judmann's *Mayerling—the Facts Behind the Legend*, which was the subject of a feature article last week, is published by Harrap at £4.



Dr. WILLIAM PALMER
How did he persuade his victims?

PLACID PRINCE OF POISONERS

By MICHAEL GILBERT

Infamous Victorians by GILES ST. AUBYN. Constable, £2-50.

Reverse Your Verdict by VINCENT BROME. Hamish Hamilton, £3.

WHY are so many books written about real-life murders? The subject-matter is sordid, and of no instructional value except to policemen and pathologists; and, one hopes, to an even smaller number of people who may aim to improve on the original performance.

However, if such an expression can be excused in such a context, William Palmer was indeed a Prince of Poisoners. The known victims of this placid, logical monster include a number of his illegitimate children, four of his five legitimate children, his wife, his mother-in-law, his younger brother, an uncle, two, or perhaps three of his more pressing creditors—and finally a young man called John Parsons Cook: a murder for which he was publicly executed in 1856, at the age of 31.

George Henry Lamson was in all respects a lesser practitioner in the same line. Whether he took more than one life is open to question. Moreover, it is clear by modern standards that he was mentally unbalanced. The main interest in his case is that he was one of the first poisoners known to use the alkaloid aconitine. Lamson was hanged in 1882. By this time the ceremony was no longer public.

Giles St. Aubyn is an historian of original subject, as readers of his "Royal George" will know. The Palmer and Lamson cases, though well known, have infinite possibilities in the way of fresh psychological analysis, in particular the first of them.

What quirk of fate or twist of character turned Palmer from a "good" boy into a cold-blooded murderer? Mr. St. Aubyn has a chilling sentence when speaking of his relationship with his unhappy wife. "He was probably fond of her, in a self-regarding way, but that neither prevented him from neglecting her while she lived, nor disposed of her when it suited him to do so."

Above all, why were his victims so docile, so obliging, so co-operative, even, as to suggest some form of death wish? When Palmer's mother was persuaded to stay with him she announced, on quitting her own home: "I shall know I shall be dead within the fortnight." And so she was. It had happened before to people who went to stay with

Dr. Palmer, particularly if their deaths would be advantageous to the doctor. How did Palmer persuade her? Was it hypnotism?

With this wealth of fascinating material, with the careful and scholarly research which has clearly gone into it, it seems ungrateful to speak of disappointment. No fact of importance has been omitted. I feel certain that it will, as the saying goes, "rank as the standard work on the subject." But if you compare it with Miss Tennyson Jesse's much shorter account, you may be persuaded that in murder, as in other walks of life, there is much merit in selection.

Reverse Your Verdict is a lighter book, but I found it most attractive. It deals with half a dozen cases in which private individuals, by one method or another, have sought to upset the decisions of the Courts.

The three most famous cases, Beck, Oscar Slater, and Archer-Shee, are well known. The trials, in 1896 and 1904, of Adolf Beck, who went to prison as the result of mistaken identity, form a cornerstone in the fabric of our legal history, being one of the proximate reasons for the establishment of a Court of Criminal Appeal.

The presentation of all the cases is clear and agreeable. Verbatim extracts, which can be tiresome, are chosen with a real eye to their effect. And the author is not afraid, on occasion, to disagree with accepted views.

What gives them their real pull, however, is that they are all about injustice. There is a strong fascination, a powerful and abiding interest, in considering those cases, mercifully few in total, in which the machinery of law and state has gone astray.

A mistake is made by a police officer. His superiors rally to his support. The Establishment closes up and falls in behind. "Rank on rank, the army of unalterable law." And then—up jumps the individual, the liberal, the humanitarian, writer, lawyer, or businessman; arms himself with a sing and five smooth stones out of the brook and prepares to take on Goliath. And, as in the Bible, so in the six cases here described, he triumphs.

What gives the accounts a particular poignancy is the thought that they can occur today. And that David does not always win. Was Hanratty guilty?

ON THE COLOUR LINE

By DOUGLAS BROWN

THE word "liberalism" in South Africa is used to describe any movement that seeks peaceful means of extending equal political rights to every citizen. Such a movement is what most of us would wish for the Republic, but it has now been totally abandoned there, on both sides of the colour line.

Janet Robertson's excellent book, *Liberalism in South Africa*, underlines this crucial fact, which needs to be hammered home to bishops and others in this country who encourage irrelevant anti-apartheid demonstrations.

It is in effect the record of a handful of righteous men for whom the Lord would have spared Sodom had they been found on the day of fire, and brimstone. Politically they no longer exist in South Africa, among either blacks or whites, for they have been crushed between the twin millstones of repression and subversion. Miss Robertson describes in detail the merciless grinding process.

Genuine liberals have nevertheless emerged in their time—that is to say, people who have worked for the constitutional achievement of racial equality and not just talked about it in African beer halls and white drawing rooms. The African National Congress itself was originally devoted to this ideal, and there was a white-led liberal party composed of members of all races.

Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963 BY JANET ROBERTSON. Oxford, £2-25.

underground and took to sabotage, and the only effective white liberals were those who betrayed their principles and did the same. In the end a law was passed forbidding any political co-operation between the races, and the Liberal party, bereft of its *raison d'être*, was forced to dissolve.

The only way out now is by revolution, whether it comes through violence or through the sheer impossibility of maintaining apartheid in a fully-developed industrial state.

Peace-loving liberals will have no more part in the change than the mobs who demonstrate at rugby matches; but, for the honour of humanity, it is right to record that there have been a tiny minority of high-principled Afrikaners, British, South Africans, Jews, Coloureds, Indians and Bantu who have thought another way worth trying.

Her short spell in the Women's Royal Army Corps is one of the best accounts and she certainly does not pull her punches. None of the recruits in her squad were lesbians, she says, but she felt there were quite a few among those who had been there longer. "I thought that almost all the training N.C.O.s were."

But that caused a flutter down at the depot.

Dictator's DOOM

By COLIN R. COOTE

Duce! The Rise and Fall of Benito Mussolini by RICHARD COLLIER. Collins, £3-50

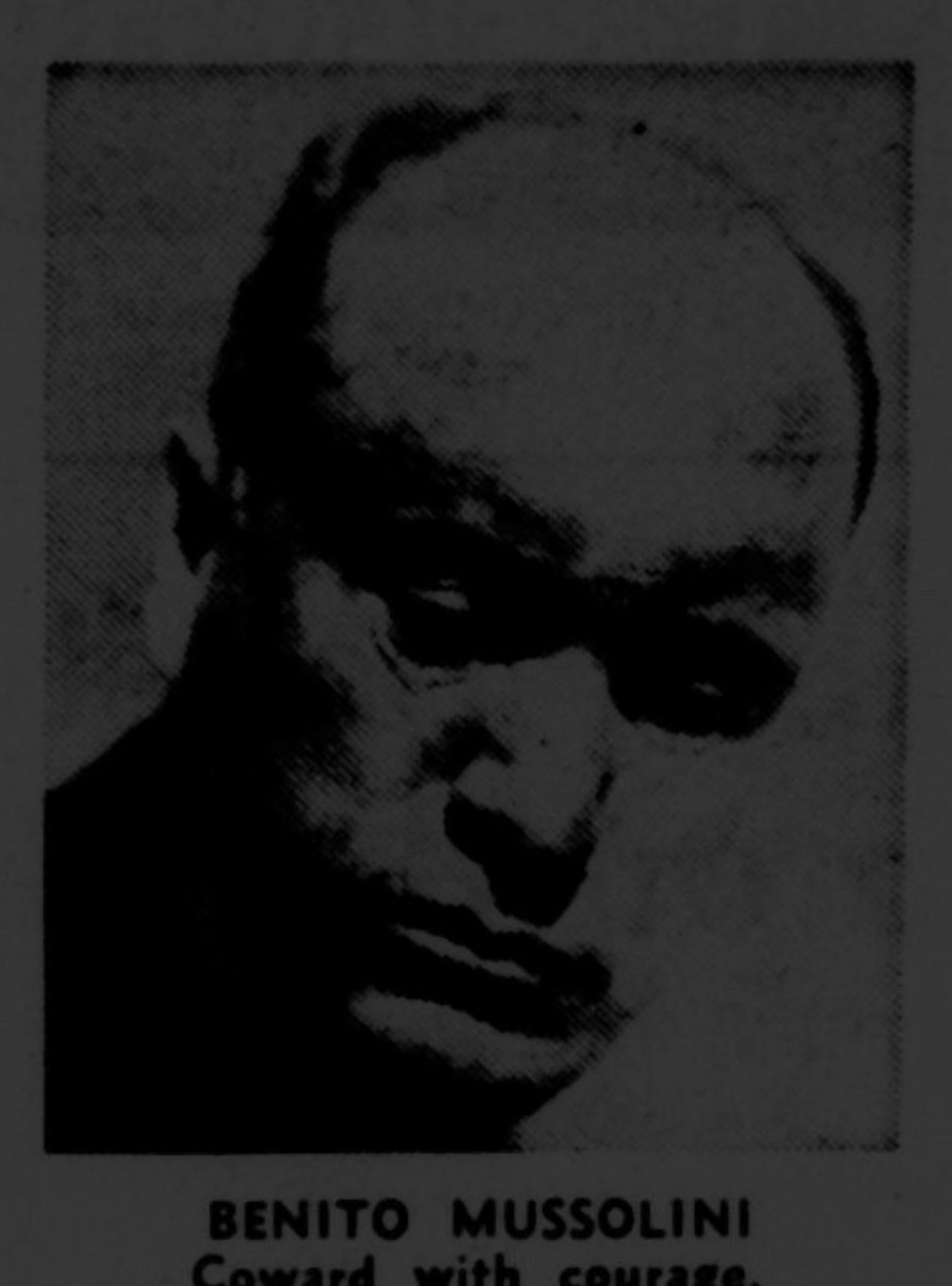
about the Duce's tremendous oratorical powers. His voice — to my ear — was not "low pitched and melodious"; it was wide ranging and rather harshly booming; and he could beat Hitler at rabble-rousing all ends up.

The story passes on to the years when Mussolini started trying to make the Italians into the material which he himself often complained that they were not; to the break with Britain so largely caused by those two ineffables, Ramsay MacDonald and John Simon; to the slow glide into the arms of Hitler; and thence to the ghastly end when Il Duce was left hanging like a hunk of meat in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan.

For most of this period, history will probably still prefer F. W. Deakin's brilliant work, "The Brutal Friendship", with its account of the relationship between the Teutonic and the Latin thugs. But Mr. Collier's book can claim to have arrived by a tortuous and sensational route at a correct estimate of Mussolini's character and services to Italy.

Mussolini was that oddity, a coward who could work himself up into a mood of courage. Even before the second world war he did not do as much for Italy as his fans then claimed. There is a case to be made for Salvemini's contention that Italy would have recovered from the chaos of 1919 and "the trains" would have "run to time" if Mussolini and Fascism had never been born.

But it is true, as Mr. Collier states, that until the Matteotti affair he had lapses from self-defecation and possibly genuine



BENITO MUSSOLINI
Coward with courage.

longings for other things than dictatorship, and that he did something substantial for archaeology and agriculture.

In foreign policy, he forgot Garibaldi's maxim: "War with all the world, but peace with England"; though it must be said that Neville Chamberlain's England misrated him almost as much as it did Hitler. Chamberlain sponed to sup with that devil; and yet on their side the Italians in their heart of hearts considered a German as much a "brutto Tedesco" in 1940 as they had in 1917. They did not want greatness thrust upon them. But no human being quite deserved the end—much like that of Rienzi—of which Mr. Collier spares us no grisly detail.

"You're not crying?" a woman asked Mussolini's widow. "You haven't lost anyone?" Had she?

SPIKES AT ARMS

By JOHN MOYNIHAN

OF these two Spikes at Arms, Sgt. Mays of the Royal Signals was the more professional. When niggard Gunner Milligan was called up to play his "part" in Hitler's downfall, ex-regular cavalryman Mays was resuming a khaki career he had happily left behind in 1936.

"We shall have to let the blighter out," Mays's adjutant had said then. "The Army Council Instruction definitely states that premature discharges will be granted if permanent employment is offered."

Mr. Mays tells in the third volume of his absorbing autobiography, *No More Soldiering*

No More Soldiering for Me, how pleased Neville Chamberlain and the Army were to have him back. He had gained experience working as a sorter in Woking post office and behind the counter at Hayes post office ("I resorted to fisticuffs only to defend the honour of the postmaster").

Mr. Mays's discharge papers in 1936 had described him as "honest, sober and trustworthy" (word for word for this reviewer's own); he had been an excellent horseman in India, he had gained experience in telegraph-wireless.

Mr. Mays was blown up on a motor-cycle shortly afterwards and evacuated back to England. His ambition after gaining a demob suit was to go to a university and he later gained a scholarship to Newbattle Abbey College, Dalkeith.

In 1936, he found life as a soldier a "divvy street full of disadvantages." To support his family while pursuing his academic career he worked at a number of menial jobs including one in a fish-and-chip shop.

We all know what happened to the other Spike.

A Love of Flowers by H. E. BATES. Michael Joseph, £2.

I F I were to tell H. E. Bates that *A Love of Flowers* is the best garden book that I have never written, it is to be hoped that he will not be offended. What I mean is that it is a distillation of all the gardening books that I have been trying to write throughout my life.

Here is a man who actually realises the importance of *Heliohorus argutifolius* (without whose consultations nobody's life can be regarded as complete). Here is a man whose year begins with the exquisite offerings of *Primula denticulata*,

and who celebrates the shortening months with *Sedum Autumn Joy*. Again and again he sings the praises of the flowers that I have loved myself.

Mr. Bates's canvas is wide enough to include the infinite variations of the leaf as opposed to the flower, the branches that shadow the blossom, the greens, the greys, the silvers and the golds. For many years I have been trying to make gardeners look at leaves. With singularly little effect, if one is to judge by the static picture of the contemporary gardening scene. Now, at last, I find an ally.

Never done

By PHILIP PURSER

NOT only is a woman's work never done, it is also—if she goes out to work—often screamingly monotonous, miserable, tiring and, as the woman in the bakery said, enough to make you spit in the cakes.

Polly Toynebe paints a pretty grisly, but nevertheless extremely fascinating, picture of the various jobs women do in *A Working Life* (Hodder, £2). She obtained her facts first-hand, working in various factories and such places as a maternity ward in a hospital.

Her short spell in the Women's Royal Army Corps is one of the best accounts and she certainly does not pull her punches. None of the recruits in her squad were lesbians, she says, but she felt there were quite a few among those who had been there longer. "I thought that almost all the training N.C.O.s were."

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