

Shakespeare was a mighty poet, but the world's worst playwright, not to be named in the same breath with Ibsen. I detest the artificial, and have an uncanny faculty of smelling it out. That is why I do not care for Bernard Shaw. His plays are not sincere."

If *A Fool's Odyssey* will not pass muster as a novel it is of great interest as a concoction of adventure-yarn and compendium of useful South Seas information.

Another mixture of fact and fiction, *This is the Life*, by Aubrey Wisberg and Harold Waters, is harder to read. Its opening sentence proves that two can write as cheaply as one: "Stiff and sheer leaped the cliffs of Nova Scotia from their grim skirt of surf-sprayed rocks in the pallid dawn." The collaborators offer, in a style alternately sprightly and muscle-bound, a hero who is an Australian serving on the United States Coast Guard cutter *Mohican*, engaged in the International Ice Patrol. Five photographs of icebergs supply almost all the credible fact in a story of which we are assured that its details and incidents are all true. Much of the narrative (its period seems to be 1922) is made up of accounts of boozing

and whoring in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We are invited to believe that a Royal Naval Chaplain (of H.M.S. *Antelope*) could, while sober, be bribed with a bottle of gin to marry, in the Mariners' Arms Hotel (a disorderly house) the *Mohican's* captain-of-the-head to a thieving prostitute. On board ship the fun consists of malicious interference with the scientific work of Professor Heinkle, ichthyologist, and of crude practical jokes.

There is no striving for effect or fiction in *A Canuck in England*, by Howard Clegg, a diary kept by a Canadian soldier who did not see active service, and who has now apparently left the Army. He writes pleasantly enough, as though to his parents or the local newspaper: "It would have been hard to get together a better bunch of fellows to live and work with or from whom to learn about life in all its varied phases . . . Very comical situations occur when the men who have over-indulged in the canteen try to make their way to their quarters." He came looking for the "be-monocled, silk-hatted and be-spatted English Johnny of the music-halls," and is agreeably surprised to encounter in a pub "a big fellow with a ruddy face and bulbous nose," who says, "So you bastards are back again." From the prominent Canadian citizen and professional publicity man which our author admits he is, such a book is refreshingly naive, and apparently he likes us, and every now and then makes a really acute observation of English character and customs.

twenty who are capable of great heroism because, according to Mr. Bates, they lack the imagination to be afraid of death (the lack of imagination itself being shown as a quality to admire). The only piece in the book which reaches Mr. Bates' former level is "There's no Future in it," the story of an airman who *does not like what he does* but continues to do it because he knows it to be necessary. That is the only excusable point of view; to kill in war-time is an act of faith: it is insufficient to call it a good show.

Major-General Sir Ernest Swinton's collected stories are a different proposition. One cannot judge these "yarns" (see author's preface), most of which were written between 1909 and 1914, by the same standards that one would apply to the author of "The Kimono" and "I Am Not Myself." It might, indeed, be enough to indicate the quality of the book by quoting some examples of dialogue.

A "Non-Com" speaking: "Looks like a furriner, or one of them blooming Chun-chooses, with that beard an' all. But 'e swears like an Englishman . . . I think 'e's woozy."

Or this:
"Ghazis?"—"Thugs?"—"Dacoits?"—"Dog fight?"—"Landslip?"—"Leopard?"—"Mutiny?"—"Murder?"

A very bad show.

J. MACLAREN-ROSS.

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The Killers

The Greatest People in the World. By Flying Officer X. Guild Books. 6d.

The Green Curve Omnibus. By Major-General Sir Ernest Swinton. Faber. 8/6.

EVER since I read one of Flying Officer X's stories in *The Listener* I had been waiting anxiously for the volume of his collected pieces to appear. I did not then know that the author was Mr. H. E. Bates, so that my extreme eagerness to see more of his work was not based on his previous reputation nor on my admiration for Mr. Bates as a short story writer. The book appeared; I immediately seized upon it. I was as immediately disappointed.

Pilots vaulting sofas on their return from difficult and dangerous operations, getting whistled in the Mess, talking about their popsies, the repetitive slang, the childish laconic speech: "Think we pranged them?" "A piece of cake," "Good show, good show"; danger as a circus trick to be performed as a prelude to the gin and french, the wink at the W.A.A.F. waitress; schoolboys clowning with no sense of death's dignity. The bouncing little man adding up his operational hours; the former sheriff counting the notches on his guns; that these figures, apart from their feats of courage and daring, should be presented as admirable is a terrible warning against the deterioration of moral values that every writer in the Forces should guard against. Daily association with the bestial and stupid, the hysterical romanticism which leads people to say "the Army makes a man of you," should not allow the sensitive writer to be tricked into extolling the personal merits of guardsmen-killers or boys of

Route March

Vacantly the eyes
At windows of hotels
From plates of porridge rise,
And washing bowls:

The battalion swings out gaily
From the sea-side town,
Past familiar café
And favourite saloon:

Subsequently plunges
Through dark and lengthy lanes
More redolent of dung than roses,
And muddled by the rains:

Eyes stinging with sweat,
For miles we drag our loads
Of fast increasing weight
Along the switchback roads:

Some three hours ago
Since we left off singing,
And now no N.C.O.
Holloas, "Keep your dressing."

Then arms are sloped on shoulders,
Miraculously braced.
Hobbling cripples change to soldiers;
Battalion marches past.

Perhaps some day we march to where
Bombers dive and snipers lurk,
Or maybe, when we're through with war
We have to march the streets for work.

Meanwhile we go through our paces
Till we know every stick and stone
Along the roads of these sad counties—
Here Time halts, and we march on.

DONALD BISHOP.