

The Faces of War

Men of the RAF. Introductions by Sir William Rothenstein and Lord David Cecil. 40 illustrations after drawings by Sir William Rothenstein. London: Oxford University Press. \$3.

War Pictures by British Artists: War at Sea. Introduction by Admiral Sir Herbert H. W. Richmond. War Pictures by British Artists: Blitz. Introduction by J. B. Morton. War Pictures by British Artists: RAF. Introduction by H. E. Bates. War Pictures by British Artists: Army. Introduction by Colin Coote. London: Oxford University Press. 50 cents each.

AMONG THE GREAT qualities of the British are the steadiness and tough continuity with which they hold the gains of civilization in the face of desperate war. These five books of pictures, on the whole the best pictorial record of the war published thus far, are symbols of that admirable steadiness and continuity. The pictures were produced by British artists working under the auspices of the Admiralty, the War Office, the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Home Security, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Information Artists' Advisory Committee. With the exception of Sir William Rothenstein the artists were either employed directly by the ministries concerned or their drawings purchased by them.

The drawings and paintings are generally of a high quality, though it is difficult to judge works of art from reproductions. They give a good cross section of the British war effort in a variety of styles that run from academicism to the more contemporary tendencies, though there is nothing extreme in either direction. Artists like Sir William Rothenstein, Sir Muirhead Bone and H. G. Eves have the academician's careful control of medium and politeness of style. Paul Nash, Henry Moore and Eric Ravilious are more abrupt and individual, and express something of the civilian's sudden pitchforked awareness of strange war. Paul Nash's "Bomber in the Corn" is a brooding color note on a fallen world. Henry Moore's remarkable paintings of people in air-raid shelters are gray, voiceless affirmations of human fortitude in the hellish counterpoint of blitz. Edward Ardizzone's caricatures of the many-sided face of disaster have a gentleness and humor which are very appealing.

Sir William Rothenstein's portraits of the men of the RAF are excellent of their type, closely observed and ably drawn. They provide a distinguished and necessary record of the flyers who fought the Battle of Britain. Rothenstein's introduction is enlivened by the direct, factual observations of a visual-minded man whose enthusiasm for his subjects has an element of almost boyish wonder, and the Briton's deep feeling for a job well done. The comments of Lord David Cecil have the craggy, country-squire forthrightness which is one of the good qualities of English writing.

The best portraits are those of the rank and file. Except for the drawing of Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, the pictures of generals are the least interesting. The same may be said of the portraits by H. G. Eves, Eric Kennington and others. It may not be true that generals die in bed, but it is certain that they seldom come to life in pictures. There is more character in Rothenstein's Sergeant Greenalade, Sergeant Kirk, and Flying Officer Maclaren. These,

and Eric Kennington's powerful Leading Seaman Povey and Stokers Martin and Gill, are faces for a new triumph of Nelson or Drake or Wellington. They illuminate the role of the "ordinary bloke" in this people's war.

They illuminate, too, the role of the artist. Britain seems to have decided that the photographic record is not enough, and that only the "artist with his heightened powers of perception can recognize which elements in a scene can be pickled for posterity in the magical essence of style." Even more important is the fact that art alone is capable of the essential omission which is necessary for any wide-scale understanding of the visual world. No recording instrument can give the full impact of nature. All must abstract in one way or another, the camera no less than the artist. There is always a sense of "tearing out" in the camera's crowded abstraction, of parts ripped from their background. Art gives us the sense of context.

That is why Matthew Brady's photographs of the Civil War, extraordinary as they are, do not give us the full-bodied dynamics of the conflict which we get from the few war paintings of Winslow Homer. Homer gives us the breathing vitality of the front. Brady focuses on the somber and the static, a group of wounded in a Washington hospital, a pile of bodies like disordered bales of old clothes beside a fence at Manassas. This photographic record is necessary as history, but it is not as valuable in the long run nor as useful during wartime as the work of the artist. The British war pictures give us the symbol as well as the factual record. They have an emblematic quality. That is why they are important not only for the British but also for ourselves.

HOLGER CAHILL

The Economic Novel

The Economic Novel in America, by Walter Fuller Taylor. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 378 pages. \$4.

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK is a gross exaggeration. To live up to it Professor Taylor should logically have gone back at least as far as Cooper's trilogy, "The Littlepage Manuscripts," which deals with the long struggle between the propertied and propertyless that culminated in New York State's anti-rent war. Or if he chose to confine his subject to the fiction of the industrial movement, he should have begun with the first adumbrations in the period before the Civil War, and have thus included such incisive criticism of the lot of the Lowell factory girls as Melville made in his sketch, "The Tartarus of Maids." But the author has begun with 1870, and then, instead of finding his real climax in "The Financier" and "Babbitt" and "The Big Money," in the growing awareness on the part of our novelists of Veblen's main distinction between production and selling, he has chopped off his investigation at convenient Ph.D. length with the death of Frank Norris.

Within these mechanical limitations, he has treated one very interesting phase of a larger evolution. He could accurately have called it "A Decade of the Economic Novel," for the real center of his study extends from "Looking Backward" in 1888 to the Spanish-American War. Within that decade appeared almost three-quarters of the two hundred and fifty novels Taylor has catalogued