

Next Book: "London Belongs to Me" by Norman Collins (Jan., 1949)

London Pride

IF this book is not enjoyed by an overwhelming majority of members, then some change, of which I have not been notified, has occurred in human nature. It is important for me, as a critic and as an ordinary man, to be reassured on this point.

London, to start with, in what more attractive place could you set a novel? And if you are choosing a time of the year, what better time than Christmas? Style now: shall we say Dickens-Wells-Priestley, modified? Subject: can you beat life in London in our own times with characters from every walk of life? Yet with all these advantages it would be possible to go wrong. Countless novelists have done so. Norman Collins makes no

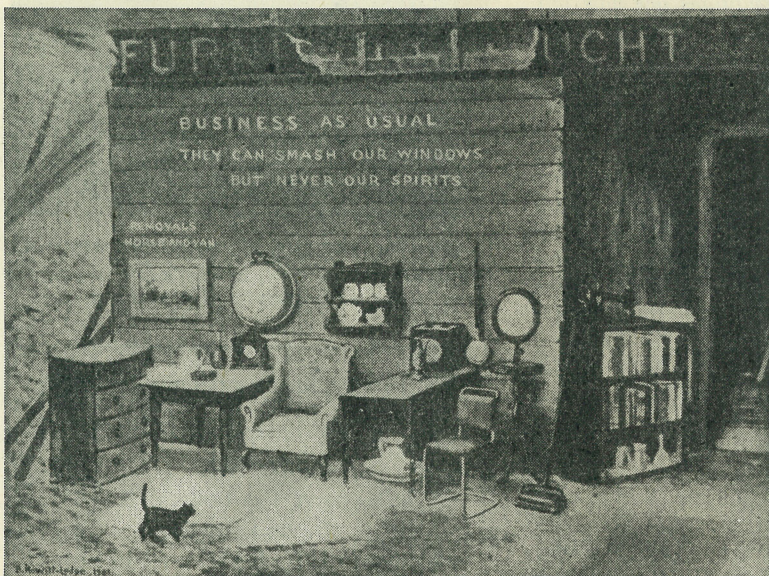
mistakes. He leaves out no ingredients. He stirs and stirs. He flavours the mixture with high spirits. And he gives you a big helping.

I have read *London Belongs to Me* before. Opening it again, I am a little daunted by its 664 pages. But it was a mistake to begin at the beginning, if I wanted to save time. I found myself trapped, unable to avoid reading the whole book again, unable to keep a cool critical head, alternately too amused and thrilled to be able now to render a clear account of the remarkable proceedings. How can I reduce to a synopsis a novel of more than Dickensian generosity of incident and character?

Dickens is bound to come to mind. He comes in the very first chapter. The time is half-past four on Friday, the 23rd of December, 1938.

Mr. Jossler, for forty-two years clerk in a city firm, is to be presented with a marble clock on the occasion of his retirement. The clock is described—here, I think, is the Dickens touch—as “an imposing substantial sort of clock, the kind of thing which looked as though it actually manufactured Time.”

The superficial resemblance to Dickens in the verbal manner of this novel and the slight tincture of the Dickens spirit are



BUSINESS AS USUAL by B. Howitt Lodge.

From *Air Raids*, one of four volumes in the series *War Pictures* by British Artists. (Oxford University Press, 1s. 6d.)

THE AUTHOR OF THE DECEMBER BOOK

EVELYN WAUGH, now the outstanding diehard of the intellectual Right, has travelled far in outlook and reputation since, as author of *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, he became the Young Master among novelists of the late 1920's and early 1930's. He is the second son of the late Arthur Waugh, publisher and critic (he was born in Hampstead in 1903). From Lancing School he went to Hertford College, Oxford.

Waugh, undergraduate, is thus delineated by Harold Acton in his *Memoirs of an Aesthete*: “An almost inseparable boon companion was a little faun called Evelyn Waugh. His wide-apart eyes, curved lips and hyacinthine locks I had seen in marble and bronze on fountain-heads all over Italy. Though the horns had been removed, he was capable of butting in other ways. So demure and yet so wild! A faun half-tamed by the Middle Ages, who would hide himself for months and then burst upon the town with capricious caperings. He flirted with politics,



spoke pithily at the Union, contributed cartoons to *The Isis* and was my chief support in *The Oxford Broom*, giving his first most passionately earnest short story, written in bitterness after one of youth's disillusionments. I have met other fauns, but none with such artistic integrity.”

Following a period as master at a private school, he began his wanderings through Europe, the Near East, and tropical America, which provided the material for *When The Going Was Good*. In 1939 he was commissioned in the Royal Marines, afterwards transferred to 8th Commando and, between spells of duty on hazardous missions (he took part in the famous night raid on Rommel's desert headquarters), wrote *Put Out More Flags* (1942) and *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), correcting the proofs of the last-named while working with Marshal Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. Randolph Churchill, his Commanding Officer there, has recorded these impressions of him: “Waugh is a man about whom it is impossible to be neutral. You are bound to love him or to hate him. For he is not content to confine his satirical genius to his writings, it is part of his everyday life; and friend and foe alike must be prepared to suffer under the thrusts of his rapier. The spikiness conceals a generous heart and he has scores of devoted friends. But to be a friend of Waugh you must be very tough.”

At his home in Gloucestershire (his family comprises two sons and three daughters), he is at work on an unhistorical life of the Empress Helena. Other interests include wine and architecture (he collects 18th century builders' books and 19th century chromolithographs of illuminations), and he is a member of the tribunal appointed by a London paper to award £5,000 for the best of the year's screen achievements. H. P.

(Editor's Note.—Replying to our request for information, Mr. Waugh wrote: “If you really wish to say anything, get the copy of *Time* which contained a childishly inaccurate article about me, and say the precise opposite.”)



From *Small Calendars* by J. H. B. Peel (Arthur Barker, 8s. 6d)

Heap on more wood!—the wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will,
We'll keep our Christmas merry still.

Sir Walter Scott in *Marmion*.

more or less compelled by its general design. What is unDickensian is its realism. If there is a faint suggestion of caricature in the landlady, the medium, the cloakroom woman, in Jossler himself and his wife, there is none in Percy the car thief. Percy is an observed type. He is perfectly credible. (Privately I felt glad on his behalf that he wasn't in a Graham Greene novel.) And, allowing for the fact that it is wartime, there is nothing improbable in the interlocking of all the odd pieces in this vast pattern of life.

It is not completely wartime. It is the time of the first feverish filling of sandbags and instruction in the use of the stirrup-pump.

“Mr. Puddy wasn't the build for stirrup-pumps . . . He wondered whether anyone in the government had actually tried to work a stirrup-pump before ordering them in such colossal quantities. Winston, for example. Or Mr. Bevin.”

Did you never meet a man like Mr. Puddy? You will recognise him, I think, as you will recognise many other characters presented by Norman Collins. And you will leave them apprehensively, because they have the worst of the war to go through.

“Except for a huddle of searchlights somewhere over Hammersmith way, no other lights are showing, and everything looks peaceful in the dusk. The war hasn't as much as touched Dulcimer Street yet. Perhaps never will. But you can't be sure.”

It is Christmas Day, 1940, when the book ends. DANIEL GEORGE

“I caught myself blushing”

Dear Sir,

In your BROADSHEET for September, Mr. Daniel George calls my novel, *The Wind Cannot Read*, “a kind of dream—a vision of beauty and romance granted to a weary warrior.” Now, in your October issue, it seems that a member of your staff has been having an escapist dream of beauty and romance on my behalf—for in your biographical note I am removed far from the meat ration and watery beer and settled firmly in Switzerland. I listened more carefully to the noise in my ears as I read this, wondering if it might be an avalanche. But after all, it was only another of those No. 11 buses lurching down the King's Road. (And also, if I may correct another little geographical error, my next novel has Jamaica, not Kashmir, as a background.)

Now after this carping, may I say that I have felt tremendously honoured that my first novel should have been made a World Books' “choice.” I caught myself blushing when I saw it on your colourful leaflet rubbing shoulders with so many distinguished works. And then you have solved a pressing problem for me: how to deal with those acquaintances who expect a writer to have copies of his books stacked in piles on the hall table, to be taken away as freely as hand-outs about vacuum cleaners from a shop. There had seemed no course open except rudeness or impoverishment. But now, on my hall table, there will be a pile of membership forms for your Society—and I shall have enormous pleasure in lending visitors my pen with which to sign.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Waugh