

Rebecca West



IT may be said that the fighting forces do not want intellectual fare. This is flat rubbish. In the last analysis, man does what it amuses him to do. If he has cultivated his mind throughout the ages, it is because the cultivation of the mind is fun. Certain men have been debarred from the opportunity to cultivate their minds by economic handicaps, and cannot believe that it *is* fun. Few people who have never mountaineered can believe that toiling over snowfields and forcing aching limbs up rock faces is fun, though those who have done it know there is no better. The BRC would not be using their monopoly conscientiously if they did not put talks of a sound, intellectual character before people who have been prejudiced against the intellect by economic handicaps. But, in any case, the Army does not consist solely of such people. As any Army lecturer will tell you, there are innumerable soldiers who hunger and thirst after knowledge, and know no peace without it. Open the *Radio Times* and see just what the General Forces programme is doing about this appetite for knowledge!

Where are the teachers of the day, the wise men who, being wise are humble, and would esteem it the proudest honour to teach what they know to the soldiers and sailors who are defending them? Where is Gilbert Murray or Julian Huxley, or Philip Guedalla, or Maurice Bowra? Such men poke their heads up here and there for half an hour. It is not enough. There should be frequent opportunities, day in, day out, for such men to give of their best. Thus the ideas which are the foundation of life in any age could be discussed, and there should be lectures on what we are planning in this country to work out these ideas, in such spheres as education and housing. There should be debates between rivals in the world of ideas, on the theoretical and the practical plane. We should have the men overseas sharing the intellectual adventures on which we here have embarked. For example, the fact that in tubes and on buses we constantly see people, old and young, studying Russian grammar books should be the cue for General Forces programme to provide simple radio lessons in Russian. After all, as Monsieur Stephane used to show us in his French hours, language lessons on the radio can be—far more than scraping performances of tunes from stale musical comedies—"light entertainment."

C. Day Lewis



WE are certainly reading *more* books. The blackout has seen to that. But it is not only a matter of the physical conditions of war which drive people to books by curtailing other forms of recreation. The war has also created certain spiritual conditions, favourable to literature and the other arts; it throws into high relief spiritual and emotional problems which in peacetime many of us passed lightly over. We take ourselves, on the whole more seriously; we ask ourselves difficult questions—Is all this killing worth while? What is going to happen to us after the war?—and, by asking these questions, we enter into the region of values, a region where literature has always been in demand as a guide.

But, although we are taking life more seriously, this does not necessarily mean that we are taking literature more seriously, too. It simply is not true, as far as imaginative literature—novels, poetry—is concerned, that "we needs must love the highest when we see it." To get full value out of many imaginative books requires effort and co-operation on our part, just as it requires effort to get full value out of good music or painting. And effort is not a commodity we have much left of, after a wartime day's work.

Technical Books Most Popular

So it is not surprising to learn that this war's best-sellers have not come from the class of imaginative writing. Apart from the Government illustrated books—"Battle of Britain," "Bomber Command," "Front Line," and the rest of them—which easily top the best-selling lists, the books people have been buying are technical ones—books about engineering and patching old clothes and making the most of your rations, books which help people practically to get more efficient at their work or adapt themselves to war conditions. The reading of technical books—not the elementary "Plastics Without Tears" or "Prefabrication for Beginners" sort, but really tough, solid, advanced books—has particularly increased among factory workers. A friend of mine, who has had a lot to do with factories during the last year estimates that there must be somewhere between one and two million factory workers who are reading such books, or possess the very high intellectual calibre necessary for reading them. Moreover, in my friend's experience, hardly any of them read anything

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