

PORTRAIT OF A GENERAL

MONTGOMERY. By Alan Moorehead. Hamish Hamilton Ltd., London and Melbourne.

It is a pity that this excellent book has reached New Zealand a little shop-worn. If no one yet has read all of it, many of us have read much of it in the columns of newspapers and magazines, and it is not going to be easy now to persuade us to spend sixteen shillings on a story that we more than half know. On the other hand Montgomery himself will be here in a week or two, and that happy accident may save the booksellers. If it doesn't, this review will not, since it is not possible by praising a book to sell it to people who have lost interest in it. But praising it is certainly easy. It is just about as vivid a picture as we could have of a soldier while he is still on the active list; a journalist's picture, certainly, but altogether removed from the slap-dash profile. Moorehead came as completely under the spell of Montgomery as most of the soldiers themselves did, and for the same reason: because Montgomery trusted him, talked to him, was never uppish with him, and never made him feel that warfare was something he could not understand. But

he was never so completely under the spell as to be a blind partisan. The Montgomery legend was always a little lost on him, and the Montgomery method often a little strange. There was an egotism there, something better than vanity but not at all like modesty, that it was difficult not to resent until it justified itself. Moorehead sees all that and is frank about it. But his real achievement is that seeing so many spots he still never loses sight of the sun. Montgomery won his battles not by luck but by prayer and fasting and skill; by character as well as by originality; above all by inspiring confidence and evoking character in his men (men even more than officers, though he succeeded with both); and Moorehead not only understands all that himself but makes sure that his readers will too. Another service that most New Zealanders will value is the clearing away of all the nonsense that has been written about the personal relations between Montgomery and Eisenhower. It happened twice that the course of events would have poisoned relations between these two if either had been less than a first-rate soldier and a high-minded man. Eisenhower displaced Montgomery as Supreme Commander in

the West—not for military reasons but for political—and as Supreme Commander he later over-ruled Montgomery when their plans clashed over the advance from the Seine into Germany. Though each was as bitter a blow as a man of Montgomery's record and temperament could suffer, there is no evidence at all that it separated the two men personally, and the most convincing first-hand evidence that it did nothing of the kind. Here is what the two men themselves have put on record:

"When Allies work together," Montgomery wrote, "there are bound to be different points of view, and when these occur it is essential that they are thrashed out fully and frankly; but once a final decision is given, it is the duty of all members of the team to carry out that decision loyally. The Allied team worked in this spirit, and by its team work achieved overwhelming victory."

"In June, 1945, when the German war was over and Supreme Headquarters was being dissolved, I wrote to General Eisenhower and thanked him for all that he had done for the British armies, and for myself. I said that I wanted him to know that I, a British general, had been proud to serve under American



LORD MONTGOMERY
"By prayer and fasting, and skill"

command. Ike, as I like to call him, wrote me this very charming letter:

Dear Monty.—Your note to me written on the 7th is one of the finest things I have ever received. I am intensely gratified that you feel as you do. In the aftermath of this Allied effort enduring friendships and feelings of mutual respect among higher commanders will have a most beneficial effect. The team must continue to exist in spirit.

(continued on next page)



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