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BOOKS

The Witch's Cauldron

BETWEEN TWO WARS. By D. C. Somervell. Methuen and Co.

A VOLUME in the new Home Study Books series, *Between Two Wars*, skilfully summarises much information about international affairs and the precarious peace which ended in 1939. The general outlook is robustly conservative, the atmosphere one of realism. Chamberlain is defended, Stanley Baldwin, even Lloyd George. ("It takes a great deal of human quality to make a Lloyd George or a Clemenceau, and comparatively little to make a left-wing journalist"). Mr. Somervell is a great worshipper of things as they are: if a man's plans succeed, he is a statesman; if they fail or are never tried, an impractical dream (in one instance, I am afraid, an "impracticable" one). He eases himself out of the Spanish difficulty by remarking that the fiercely uncompromising Spaniards are "singularly ill-fitted for parliamentary government"; we must take it then that they are well-fitted to enjoy the paternal ministrations of Franco. Mr. Somervell finds proportional representation satisfactory only to those who "make a god of the multiplication table" and discovers that "the very first necessity of a democratic parliamentary system is that it should be interesting," a popular contest, in fact, like football, wrestling, or cricket. That's why British democracy is so much more democratic than other kinds. The after-dinner paradoxes of an Oxford high table read rather coldly in print.

As is inevitable in such a summary, facts are occasionally allowed to become distorted: the Southern Tyrol in 1919 certainly contained a quarter of a million people of German blood, but it also included then—though Mr. Somervell does not say so—more than that number of people of Italian blood. But the facts in *Between Two Wars* are generally good. Often they are surprising: we are reminded that it was the Germans' own refusal to use their gold reserves to buy food abroad that prolonged the blockade at the end of the 1914-18 war. Mr. Somervell's opinions, whether we like them or not, are vigorously and effectively presented.

This book was finished in the middle of 1945 and has waited over two years in the printing queue.

REALITY IN SHADOW

THE IDOLS OF THE CAVE. By Frederic Prokosch. Chatto and Windus.

THIS novel is not quite a satire and not quite a steady study of manners in darkest war-time New York. It is, in fact, not quite—not quite anything. The novelist seems to strike no final balance between satire and delineation. It has great merits. It is lively. It is full of excellent minor characters all firmly and delicately sketched—some of them what E. M. Forster called "flat" characters, people identifiable by one set mannerism or one constantly repeated action or speech or thought.

Its larger characters are not so clearly drawn. The hero, Jonathan Ely, is just a bit dim. He gets the girl almost at once—the wrong one—but is never

rewarded for his vague and scrupulous amiability by getting another. Even Lydia, whom he loves and who is so impossible, is a more sympathetic, because a stronger, character. Pierre Maillard, the sub-hero, a young French painter, also gets the girl—quite the wrong one for him, too. We expect Delia, even if she does leave her husband for Pierre, to reach some equilibrium before the end of the book, and her suicide is an unsatisfying ending. It is our uncertainty as to the novelist's purpose which diminishes the effect of a good but not supreme novel.

The world of New York society at the point where it borders the arts and the fringe of socially-acceptable refugees from Europe (whose motto, it appears, is "Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we leave New York") is the territory of this novel. Those who have difficulty in making tactful but non-committal remarks to an artist on his work should read it for tips. Everyone is very well-bred.

—David Hall

A BIOGRAPHER ON HIS KNEES

FLINDERS LANE. *Recollections of Alfred Felton.* By Russell Grimwade. Melbourne University Press.

UNLESS the subject is divine I dislike an author who writes on his knees because I dislike to read on mine. Alfred Felton was a Victorian gentleman in every sense of both words who bequeathed a large sum of money, in the form of an Arts and Charities Bequest, to be spent on the purchase of works of art for the libraries, museums, and art galleries of Victoria, which makes him worthy of respect, but not of reverence, and Grimwade's reverential attitude towards his subject—his determination to make us feel that we are in A Presence—gets in the way of his presenting a vital picture of the man. His office, his home, his personal effects are all described with more conscientious fidelity than is usually accorded the relics of a saint. His chronicler cannot take us into his storeroom without telling us the origin, contents, and destination of each sack.

In spite of this fault *Flinders Lane* is not without merit. Its aim is to "let Australians know what manner of man their benefactor was, and what were the motives behind this act of benevolence," and in a roundabout way it does do that; and it draws a good and sometimes amusing picture of Victorian life in Victoria. It is also liberally and delightfully illustrated with wood engravings by Helen Ogilvie.

THE HOW AND WHY OF ACTING

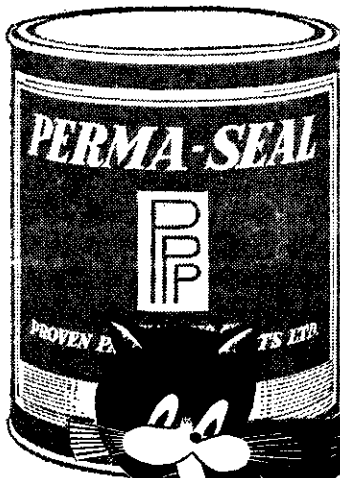
THE AMATEUR AND THE THEATRE. By Bonamy Dobree. Hogarth Press. Through the British Council.

TO people disinterestedly interested in the theatre the amateur is something of an embarrassment—he is sometimes too good not to be taken seriously and often too bad not to be treated as a joke. Dobree in *The Amateur and The Theatre* puts him in his place, and it is a high proud place which only an amateur can fill.

The theatre by the very nature of its medium tends always to turn in upon

(continued on next page)

it pays to be fastidious—



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