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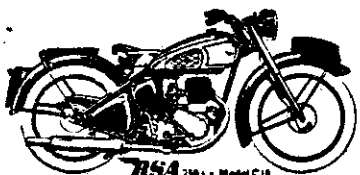
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BOOKS

NEGLECTED EMPIRE

TWENTIETH CENTURY EMPIRE. By H.
V. Hodson. Faber and Faber, London.

MR. HODSON'S thesis is
that the old British Empires
are dead, and in the dif-
ferent conditions of to-day we
must be up and doing with new
ideas and energy to develop our
estate, or indeed to save it in a world
of rival ideologies. The first British
Empire, he says, ended with the Ameri-
can Revolution. The second lasted until
Dominion self-government replaced
colonial dependence in the settlement
colonies. The third, the Commonwealth
as we have known it for many years,
lasted till the end of the second world
war. If there had been no British Em-
pire, says Mr. Hodson, it would have
been necessary to create one. Between
Waterloo and the war of 1914 it pre-
vented or localised wars, and was ac-
cepted by the world because at best it
was useful and at worst it was never
a menace. In the first world war, how-
ever, it nearly went under, and was
saved by America. This happened again
in the second war, into which the Em-
pire entered pitifully unprepared,
though it should be noted that Britain
was in better shape than the Dominions.
Now we have given India her freedom:
Buma has left us; the Mother Country
has been gravely weakened: the wine
of nationalism is going to the heads of
colonial peoples; strategic, economic,
and social problems press on all sides.
Yet in this critical period there is no
Committee of Imperial Defence, and
when Mr. Hodson wrote, the Imperial
Conference as a
method of regular
consultation had
lapsed.

Mr. Hodson's con-
tention is that the
Empire has always
been more or less
neglected. It has
been treated, in his
phrase, as pasture
land rather than
arable. Twice it
came near to ex-
tinction, because the
British are an "in-
curably optimistic" race, who trust to
Providence and are apt to neglect dis-
tant problems. The colonies proper
were run on the principle that they
were not to be exploited, but were not
to be a charge on the British taxpayer.
Only in the last few years have large-
scale development plans been framed
and put into operation—at the British
taxpayer's expense.

THERE was drift in India. Mr. Hod-
son recognises the benefits Britain
has conferred on India, but his criticism
of policy and administration is pungent.
His picture of British authority in re-
lation to the peoples of India, descend-
ing to such details of officialdom's daily
life as the primitiveness of sanitation
and the scandal of the rickshaw-coolie
(who, one hopes, will be abolished
throughout the East forever), is the
most entertaining part of the book. The
headings "Thick Red Tape" and "Broad

Red Carpet" are significant. The British
allowed too great a gulf to exist be-
tween them and the people. In Mr.
Hodson's opinion, giving India her free-
dom was absolutely the right thing to
do, but Britain has it on her conscience
that she handed over responsibility for
government without having adequately
prepared Indians to run it. Beware of
bureaucracy, he warns us, especially
when it is isolated, and points to Can-
berra as well as to New Delhi and
Simla. India faces an inevitable social
and economic revolution and it will be
a fight to the death. It is better, says
Mr. Hodson, that this should come with-
out the presence of an alien authority.
Had Britain remained in India, she
might have fallen with India to de-
struction, but to-day she is in a posi-
tion to exercise a rescuing and healing
power.

However, the responsibility for the
neglect of the Empire is by no means
Britain's alone. The Dominions, Mr.
Hodson points out, have never borne
their fair share of defence. To-day they
are sovereign States. They talk gener-
alities, but they don't act with sufficient
energy or foresight or sense of unity.
Nervous of local politics, they are chary
of "ganging up." Mr. Hodson pleads
for a co-operative Commonwealth. He
would have regional commissions to
supervise defence and economic de-
velopment, and in Britain a Common-
wealth Council, which would lead to a
form of central government. He even
sets out the composition of a Com-
monwealth "Assembly." Britain, he
warns us, must be powerful or nothing.

The slogan "World
power or downfall"
was never true of
Germany, but though
not in the sense of
the old "Imperium,"
it is true of the
British Isles. Before
the war there were
disillusioned tired
people who asked
why Britain should
not become another
Denmark or Norway.
As Mr. Hodson says,
the answer came to
them in 1940. In the new meaning of
the key word, there is still such a thing
as "the craven fear of being great."
And if Britain goes, what becomes of
us in the outer seas?
—A.M.

MELLOWED ORTHODOXY
FRAGMENTA ANIMI. By Richard Lawson.
Whitcombe and Tombs

PROFESSOR LAWSON is a real
scholar. Better still, he has a truly
humanistic love of letters, and his fa-
vourite writers have become as familiar
to him as his garter. Some of his obiter
dicta are fragrant with experience. To
quote one example:

There is always a sorrow in life. Excite-
ment obliterates it for a time, but it re-
turns sooner or later. Prosperity shuts out
the sight of it for a time, but it returns
again. For alleviation of sorrow there is no
panacea in the support of society. For
nations and mankind as a whole there is
no way of life of a purely materialistic
kind that has ever escaped the final gulf
of oblivion.

(continued on next page)



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