

THE SPOKEN WORD

IDEAS AND BELIEFS OF THE VICTORIANS, a Series of Talks on the BBC Third Programme. Sylvan Press, through the British Council. English price, 21/-.

(Reviewed by Frank Sargeson)

THIS ambitious series of BBC talks on the Victorian Age is published in a thick volume running to about 160,000 words. In a foreword, Harman Grisewood, Head of the Third Programme, explains how the series was conceived, and finally realised under five headings: The Theory of Progress, Victorian Religious Belief and Controversy, Man and Nature, The Liberal Idea, and The Working Out of Victorian Ideas. Fifty specialists in the period gave 57 talks, spread over four months. The idea was that each talk should be related to the unifying ground plan, but at the same time be complete and enjoyable in itself. Any suggestion that the listener was being invited to attend a course of studies was, if possible, to be avoided.

Among the speakers were: Lord David Cecil, R. H. S. Crossman, J. W. Davidson, Humphrey House, Julian Huxley, Monsignor Knox, Canon Raven, Bertrand Russell, G. M. Trevelyan, and G. M. Young.

At this distance it is difficult to say what one's reactions would be to a succession of digested Victorian studies, primarily designed to be listened to over a period of four months. It cannot be said, however, that the talks in their printed form are entirely satisfactory. Good radio journalism is one thing, and good literary journalism another; and if the distinction isn't already clear, then I think this book makes it so. Probably the first is the more difficult to achieve, since it is a new and so far undeveloped form of expression; and the most serious shortcoming in the printed talks under review is that they frequently achieve neither the one thing nor the other. It is not, for example, an inducement to continue reading, when one finds a speaker referring to his talk

as having been "concocted"—nor do I imagine that it would be an inducement to continue listening. But it is only fair to say that Mr. Grisewood is fully aware of the problems involved. His remarks are perceptive and to the point: a new technique of the spoken word is required, a style not yet established in literature, but of which there are signs. In other words good radio script, like good film script, may have no very close or necessary connection with literature—not at any rate as it is at present understood, after its development through many centuries; and in the meantime it should be frankly recognised that the genius of the spoken radio word has so far proved to be extremely rare.

But apart from these important matters, there is much in the printed talks to interest, and frequently to entertain, the intelligent reader. He will no doubt be in the excellent habit of reading the Victorians for himself, and drawing his own conclusions; but even so, it may be interesting to compare notes with 50 eminent authorities. After all, among them, disagreement is the rule rather than the exception. Another point for the New Zealand reader is that he would appear to possess some advantage

over most of the speakers in the series. So much of the Victorian Age survives in our country, that it is a first-hand experience.

FIJIAN SOLDIERS

THE HISTORY OF THE FIJI MILITARY FORCES 1939-45, by Lieutenant R. A. Howlett, published by the Crown Agents for the Colonies on behalf of the Government of Fiji. Price, 7/6.

SOME eleven thousand men served in the Fiji military forces during the war. About 1,500 of them were New Zealanders, officers and NCO's most of them, from the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, who commanded and trained and led in action Fijian troops only a little less picturesque in battle dress and steel helmets than in their native sulu and sandals. Two of the Colony's five battalions, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, Fiji Infantry Regiment, fought with distinction in the Solomons between October, 1943, and July, 1944. The 1st Commando of the Fiji Guerrillas, whose Special Party on Guadalcanal in December, 1942, was the first Fijian unit to see action, won



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