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BOOKS

Guns Against Planes

ACK-ACK, by General Sir Frederick Pile; Harrap. English price, 18/-.

AFTER the first three chapters, which deal with his early life and army experiences, General Pile goes into action and gives us the first comprehensive picture of the anti-aircraft defences of Britain. In 1939 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the A/A Command, and for the following six years he fought prejudice, authority, inter-service jealousy and conflict in high places to make those defences secure and efficient. But at what a cost! In the early days before and of the war, A/A was considered the Cinderella of the services, and its Commander-in-Chief was given the dregs from the army. On one occasion, out of 25 recruits who arrived at a battery, one had a withered arm, one was mentally deficient, one had no thumbs, one a glass eye which fell out every time its owner doubled to the guns, and two were in advanced stages of VD. Yet, when the war ended, the A/A Command was the most highly technical army that ever wore khaki.

Sir Frederick is the man who urged greater use of scientists in the war effort, the development of radar, and the use of women in A/A defence (he ultimately had 100,000 of them, with all the amazing provisions for the avoidance of scandal). He overcame the most tremendous obstacles at every turn, including the opposition of R.A.F. chiefs, which he could never have done without the ear of Churchill, Mountbatten and Tizard. His book is never cluttered with technical language, so that it is fortunately comprehensible to the layman, and he never excuses the early failures of his command.

"I think the A/A defences of London are the greatest scandal since Nero," wrote one infuriated citizen at a time when inexperienced operators and inefficient guns employed 8326 rounds to destroy two German aircraft and damage two others. The terrifying lack of preparation with which we entered this war is made as crystal clear as the ultimate achievements. At the Armistice in 1918 there were 286 A/A guns and 387 searchlight companies ringed round London. By 1920 there was not one gun or searchlight left. By 1939 one A/A gun was included in the defences of Southampton. Before this horrible deficiency could be overcome, Britain was fighting the battle for survival. Sir Frederick's programme called for the provision of 3744 heavy guns, 4410 light guns, 8500 searchlights and 8160 single, twin and multi-barrel projectors and equipments and the hundreds of thousands of men and women to man them. His command played an immense part in breaking the German air attacks, and when the V bombs arrived his guns shot down 1550 of them in the air, including 86 in one day. *Ack-Ack* is packed with facts, pleasant and unpleasant, and many amusing stories for and against the great.

—O.A.G.

PRESIDENT'S LADY

ABIGAIL ADAMS, by Janet Whitney; Harrap. English price, 15/-.

ABIGAIL ADAMS might well have had the once-popular sub-title, "Her Life and Times." Although the book is not



SIR FREDERICK PILE
The halt, the lame and the blind

completely absorbing as an intimate biography, it is interesting as the story of the American Revolution, revealed through the letters of an independent, discreet woman who had advance, inside information and an unusual grasp of political problems. Abigail is vivacious and charming, equally at ease living quietly with her Boston friends, as Ambassador's wife at the French and English courts, or as President's Lady.

In 1764 Abigail Smith married John Adams, fiery orator and lawyer. Her father, with sardonic humour, preached from the text, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil." A year later the vexed question of the Stamp Act forced Adams to a decision between private and public interests. "I have a Zeal at my heart for my country, which I cannot smother nor conceal. This Zeal will prove fatal to the Fortunes and Felicity of my Family." That it did not, was due to Abigail. Fervently patriotic, less analytical and more biased than John, she fully supported his revolutionary activities, though they brought loneliness, depression and financial burdens.

This biography is built upon the hundreds of letters Abigail wrote. John once said, "Your letters have more good thoughts, fine strokes and mother wit in them than I hear in a week." Her biographer has turned the reported speech of the early letters into direct speech, not always happily. When this dramatic device is dropped, the portraits gain sincerity.

—C.M.B.

"NEARLY ALTOGETHER BAD"

HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT, by Anthony Trollope; Oxford University Press (Geoffrey Cumberlege). English price, 7/-.

"THE little Thackeray," as Trollope was once called, had at least one outstanding virtue, his solidity. Not only did he have the ability always to turn out a good story, he also held the firm conviction that in his Victorian, upper-class England, all was right in the best possible of all worlds. Perhaps that was

(continued on next page)