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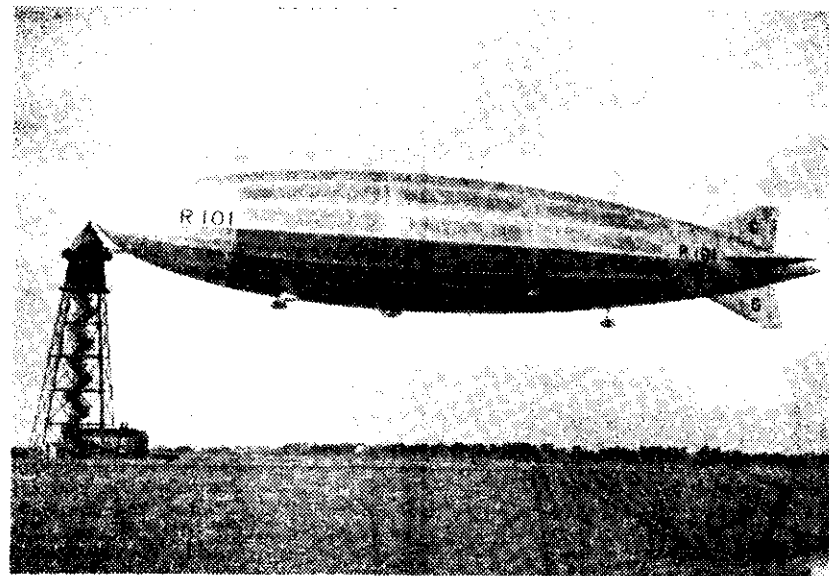
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THE ILL-FATED R.101
"A lot of bitterness has remained to creep into the record"

BOOKS

Airman into Novelist

SLIDE RULE, by Nevil Shute; William Heinemann, English price 15/-.
(Reviewed by B.C.)

THIS is the autobiography of an aeronautical engineer, N. S. Norway, who is better known to a larger section of the public as Nevil Shute, the novelist. It tells in a most readable manner of the author's youth and his difficulties with a troublesome stammer; of the early days of the de Havilland Aircraft Company; of some of the unique problems associated with designing and building airships, and of the struggle for existence of the infant Airspeed Company which was floated during the depression.

Like so many successful business men, Nevil Shute has a well-developed contempt for civil servants, and this is particularly evident in the chapters dealing with the airship. He was in charge of a team of mathematicians working on the structural problems associated with the design of the huge framework of the airship R.100. This was being made by the Airship Guarantee Company, a subsidiary of Vickers Ltd., at the same time as the Air Ministry team at Cardington was designing and building the ill-fated R.101. Rivalry between the private and State enterprise concerns became extremely bitter, and even though the events all took place between 1925 and 1930 a lot of that bitterness has remained to creep into this record. This is the first time I have read an account of all the intrigue and political manoeuvring which so overshadowed engineering prudence as to lead inevitably to the final disaster.

With the collapse of the airship industry, Nevil Shute returned to his first love, the aeroplane, and joined forces with Mr. Hessel Tiltman, a senior designer, in the formation of the Airspeed Company. It appears that the author's main function in the company's formative years was the provision of the finance necessary to keep it running. In these activities his keen sense of character, so evident in his novels, came to his aid, and he quickly assessed the type of person and the situation most likely to produce some ready capital.

The infant company suffered many reverses before it became firmly established, and it is interesting to read of some of the surprising factors which led to eventual success.

To anyone who worked in the aircraft industry in Britain during the inter-war years, the book has the increased fascination of the familiar. Readers of Nevil Shute's novels will find here another most readable story and much background material about a famous author; they may also recognise the originals of some of their favourite characters.

It will not be altogether surprising if some of the criticisms and opinions so outspokenly expressed produce fairly violent reactions in Britain.

THE GREAT REVIVAL

THE DIAGHILEV BALLET, 1909-1929, by S. L. Grigoriev, translated and edited by Vera Bowen; Constable, English price 35/-.

WITH the death in 1929 of Serge Diaghilev the greatest period in the history of the ballet was over. In twenty years Diaghilev had revived an art forgotten all over Europe outside Russia and raised it to its highest pitch. He had secured the collaboration of the finest composers, painters, conductors and dancers in the world. Stravinsky, Utrillo, Picasso, Fokine, Pavlova, Nijinsky—all worked with him, quarrelled with him, returned to him as though to a centre of magnetic attraction. Now for the first time what must be almost the full story of the Diaghilev Ballet is told by Serge Leonovitch Grigoriev, throughout the period *régis seur* or artistic director of the Company.

Grigoriev has consulted his "logs" for each of the Ballet's seasons and, from the bare accounts of rehearsals, the signing of contracts, the details of tours, woven an exciting and moving history of a great enterprise which, beginning in the glittering days of the Mariinsky Theatre of St. Petersburg, surmounted war, revolution, exile and acute and recurring financial stress. Grigoriev speaks frankly of events and persons, yet without malice and with a telling restraint. What emerges is a fascinating account of creative personalities at work, interacting and stimulating one another to achievement—and sometimes failure. For the balletomane

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