THE PUKKA SAHIBS

WHATEVER Continentals and others have said about the Englishman at one time and another, England and the English way of life remain extraordinarily attractive to many whose admiration can hardly be taken for granted. Arthur Koestler, for instance, in his recently published *The Invisible Writing*, admits that the English don't like his books—in fact, their sales in England are proportionately lower than in any other country, including Iceland. Yet it's in England that Mr. Koestler has finally settled, "for I realise that the reasons why the English find my books unlikeable are to be found in precisely that lotus-eating disposition which attracts me to them." And noting "their supreme gift of looking at reality through a soothing filter," "their contempt for systems and ideologies," and their dislike "of anything didactic and discursive in art, of any form of literary sermonising," he concludes: "On the whole, I find life in the doghouse quite cosy."

"Critical but comfortable" might sum up the feelings of this European middle-class intellectual, and after all even the Englishman can be pretty self-critical. An English Member of Parliament, R. H. S. Crossman, spoke of "English muddle-through in politics" in discussing Koestler's book, and another Englishman, Paul Johnstone, looking at both sides of the picture, has said: "Grant our sentimentality, our muddled thinking, lack of logic, distrust of cleverness, there still remains a core of toughness, of moral resolution, that is none the less priceless because it is best seen to advantage in times of difficulty."

This core of toughness and moral resolution provides the starting-point for *Aspects of an Englishman*, a series of nine half-hour programmes produced by the NZBS in which five authors examine aspects of the English character, illustrating their argument with readings from English literature from Chaucer to Sir Winston Churchill. In some programmes there are dramatic excerpts as well as prose and verse, and on one occasion, which listeners will find well worth waiting for, a musical example is used.

"Give us grace and strength to forbear and to persevere. Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind, spare to us our friends, soften to us our enemies." This prayer of Robert Louis Stevenson is the first illustration in the first programme—"Courage"—written by Dennis McEldowney. (In the eighth programme Mr. McEldowney writes again, on tolerance.) If we knew more, he says, we might find that sometimes admired courage was no more than what Dr. Johnson once called "stark insensibility"—and we might find that sometimes apparent insensibility was true courage.

Dr. Johnson, as those who have read him won't need to be told, isn't quotable only on the subject of courage—he could be pretty pungent, for example, on the Englishman's sport. But against his remark that "a fishing rod is a stick with a hook at one end and a fool at the other," David Moody, in the feature on sport, is able to quote another authority (guess who?) on "the most honest, ingenious, quiet and harmless art of angling" to this effect: "I know it worthy the knowledge and practise of a wise man." On other sports also Mr. Moody has sorted out some equally felicitous readings. Later in the series he contributes a programme on the Englishman's sentimentality.

"No one," says R. T. Robertson, in the feature which he has written on integrity, "has heard Wordsworth cry: 'Integrity, thou should'st be living at this hour,' but that's what he meant." Searching for illustrations for this programme, Mr. Robertson found there were few obvious or prolonged references to integrity in the whole of English literature, but all the same in "a wide sweep through all sorts of English writing from the 16th to the 19th Centuries" he found examples of integrity even though it might not be called by that name. Mr. Robertson also contributes a second programme, on the Englishman's insularity.

"To die," it was often said in late Victorian and Edwardian times, "will be an awfully big adventure." Those were the times when the Stiff Upper Lip had its apotheosis, and in a programme on this phenomenon Sarah Campion says that one of its few powers is to reduce great things to little matters and to give mean things undue importance. Introducing some amusing illustrations, she says: "In the Boer War, and in the endless skirmishes with the Lesser Breeds Without the Law which preceded and followed that undignified shindy, the Stiff Upper Lip was all over the place, rigid and futile as the stockades the Sahibs erected for their defences against loose-lipped savages during the Indian Mutiny."

Two programmes by Joan Stevens complete the series. The first of these—the sixth in the series—is about the Englishman's attitude to Freedom. Finally she illustrates his view of the arts—which has something in it of the suspicion of George II that painting and poetry "never did anyone any good."

Aspects of an Englishman will start from 4YC at 9.58 p.m. on Wednesday, October 6, and from 2YC at 8.13 p.m. on Thursday, October 7, repeating from 2YA the following Tuesday. It will start from 1YC in the last week of this month, and from 3YC in the first week of November.

DENNIS McELDOWNEY

Amalgamated Studios photo,
SARAH CAMPION

Amalgamated Studios photo
R. T. ROBERTSON

More Beautiful Than Good

"It is better to be beautiful than good. But . . . it is better to be good than ugly."—*The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

AN Adonis-like young man sits for a picture painted by a struggling artist. The result is an amazing likeness—a living, breathing likeness of Dorian Gray at the height of his wonderful youth. Lord Henry Wooton, the artist's friend, points out to the young man the great enjoyment he can extract from London society while his attractiveness lasts. But "youth's a stuff will not endure." Passionately the young man desires that the picture should grow old in his stead—and his wish is fulfilled. Prompted by Lord Wooton, Dorian goes from one adventure to another, leaving destruction and ruin in his path. And, after each adventure, the strange picture alters just a little.

The story mentions a number of women in his life, reflecting the increasing impetus of his downward career. There is Sybil Vane, the innocent seventeen-year-old actress, the imperious society beauty, the Duchess of Monmouth, and finally the cheap, flashy little barmaid who lives in the world to which he sometimes descends under an assumed name, a world of criminals and drug addicts.

Oscar Wilde's fable points the moral that the pursuit of pleasure alone brings no happiness to the seeker, but only a terrible restlessness, a desire for fresh pleasures and new excitements ending in complete frustration and weariness of life. The novel, published in 1891, was an immediate success because it captured so perfectly that spirit of "decadence" abroad at the end of the century, but the fascination of the story has lasted to this day, aided, of course, by the brilliance of Wilde's wit-encrusted style.

A radio adaptation of the novel has been produced by George Edwards, with Reginald Goldsworthy in the title role. For greater chills and thrills, ZB stations have programmed it for 10.30 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday nights, beginning October 5.

REGINALD GOLDSWORTHY (who played Peter Ridgeway in "Dossier on Dumetrius") takes the part of Dorian Gray