

A DEFENCE OF FREEDOM

FREEDOM, LOYALTY, DISSENT. by Henry Steele Commager. Oxford University Press. English price 8 6.

THE general theme of this little book is a warning to Americans against allowing so-called guardians of liberty to employ for its preservation methods that must in the long run defeat their own object. Besides being a moral right, freedom is, at least for the United States, a pragmatic necessity since the spiritual forces that have built up American civilisation cannot flourish if denied the right of free inquiry and criticism. When scientists grow weary of being impeded by the toils of security, when civil servants play safe for fear of being "smeared," when scholars and artists hesitate to incur the charge of expressing un-American sentiments, and even ordinary citizens shrink from joining free associations which might one day be labelled as subversive, there exists the direful possibility that America may succumb to the very dangers against which she strives to protect herself.



What is the new loyalty? Professor Commager goes on to ask, and by whom should it be defined? By radical new dealers, or by Daughters of the American Revolution? Political rights and wrongs vary from one age to another, and many great Americans of the past, from George Washington onwards, would fare badly before an un-American Affairs Committee. Is it wise to equate loyalty with the unquestioning acceptance of existing standards?

And what of guilt by association? The author revels in condemning a doctrine that was doubtless a symptom of tyranny long before the Pharisees inquired of Christ's disciples "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?" To accept the view that membership of an organisation containing subversive elements is an incriminating circumstance is to place not only individuals but also organisations of every description in an impossibly awkward situation. Either the Republican Party or the American Legion might be deemed to have suffered corruption if a few crypto-communists should succeed in joining them.

Professor Commager makes his points with logic that is not easily refutable and with a sense of humour that makes his book a pleasure to read.

—R. M. Burdon

MAN'S VARIETY

DIVERSIONS OF HISTORY. Allan Wingate. English price 15 -.

THIS is a collection of fifteen papers — pleasantly illustrated — originally published in *History Today*, to which Peter Quennell contributes an introduction. Much of the material is interesting, but because it ranges in time from the Minoan civilisation to Queen Victoria's relations with the Irish, and geographically is just as little a unity, it inevitably gives an impression of a certain scragginess and eccentricity. But let us be thankful for what it does offer us.

Of the contributors, Arthur Waley is probably the most considerable literary figure (some of the contributions are not conspicuously well-written), and J. M. Thompson the most eminent historian. Nearly all these essays throw new light on some corner of history or act as a corrective to received ideas.

It gives one, for some reason, a cosy feeling to find that King Mark did not have his seat at Tintagel but elsewhere in Cornwall, near Fowey, and that Tristram (whose tombstone has been identified) was probably his son. The friendship between John Locke and Queen Anne's Mrs. Masham, the seafaring civilisation in ancient Crete with its surprisingly excellent plumbing and aristocratic immodesty in dress, and the 15th Century private war of the Berkeleys and the Talbots which indirectly helped to preserve the former from the massacres of the Wars of the Roses, all these were worth uncovering.

The essay of strongest direct interest to New Zealand readers will be the account of the fraudulent Caribbean colonising venture of the adventurer Gregor MacGregor, "Prince of Poyais," in the early eighteen-twenties. It helps to explain the British Government's attitude to the blandishments of Edward Gibbon Wakefield 15 years later.

—David Hall

MODERN BOOKMAN

LONELY PLEASURES. by Daniel George. Jonathan Cape. English price 15 -.

THESE Lonely Pleasures—"personal, bibliographical, critical, historical, biographical, quotational"—are the pleasures of reading: but of uncommon reading. Daniel George is a bookman by temperament, one of the long line that began with Sir Thomas Browne, and continued through Charles Lamb and some notable Victorians to Logan Pearsall Smith. But he is a modern bookman, who knows he must be brief and pithy: that the literary essay nowadays has shrunk into the third leader, that if this sort of thing is to get a hearing at all it must be witty, concentrated, and à la mode. It is a sad fate: once he would have been for whole volumes in folio, now he must gather up the snippets, and can only spread himself in his index.

Yet this book—which it would be unfair to describe as a collection of short articles and reviews—will give great pleasure to many, including the professional scholars who are so often pilloried in it. It is gay, malicious, sufficiently prejudiced to be interesting; and because of its form, it can be picked up and opened anywhere: few readers will be content with a single excerpt. It is the ideal bedside book for the literary minded; no one who dips into it can fail to be entertained, or to learn something about authors and sources that he did not know before.

—J.B.

NEW YORKERS AND OTHERS

THE ENORMOUS RADIO. by John Cheever. Victor Gollancz. English price 12 6. *NO, BUT I SAW THE MOVIE.* by Peter De Vries. Victor Gollancz. English price 12 6. *NORTH COUNTRY STORIES.* edited by A. G. Brooks. Faber and Faber. English price 12 6. *TALES TO BE TOLD IN THE DARK.* edited by Basil Davenport. Faber and Faber. English price 15 -.

THE American short story at its best is one of the more encouraging features of American life. You might complain that even at its best it isn't often positive, but not that it lacks awareness; and nowhere is it more consistently aware than in the *New Yorker*, where all the stories in Mr. Cheever's fine collection first appeared. His subject is most often the pretty ordinary American of the cities, generally worshipping the Bitch Goddess, and almost certainly quietly desperate. Mr. Cheever looks deep into their lives and sets down what he sees straight-forwardly, without tricks of style. I found his

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