

PRIVILEGED OBSERVER

A DIARY WITH LETTERS, 1931-1950, by Thomas Jones; Oxford University Press, English price 30/-.

(Reviewed by R. M. Burdon)

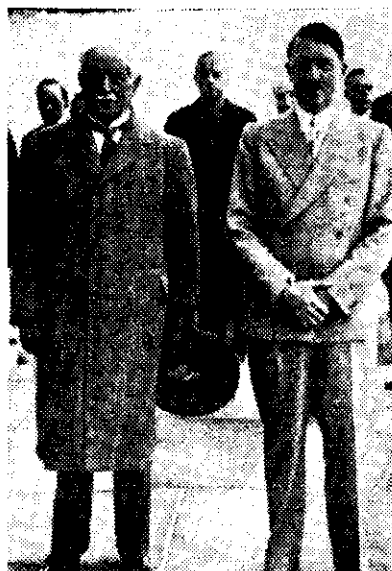
"I HAVE breakfasted with Lloyd George, had lunch with Charlie Chaplin, tea with Hitler, dinner with Mussolini and coffee with Margot Oxford and Nancy Astor. Not, it is true, on the same day, but what is time?" Time is at least something of which the writer of these words made good use. Born in humble circumstances in a Monmouthshire mining village, Thomas Jones entered the Civil Service and from 1916 to 1930 held an important post on the staff of the Cabinet Office. Resigning at the age of sixty, he became secretary of the Pilgrim Trust (an American benevolent institution), and later its chairman. This and countless other activities brought him into contact with many distinguished persons, a small selection of whom are mentioned above.

While accepting the "plutocratic embrace" and mixing on terms of equality with the great and learned, Dr. Jones retained his homely native speech. "Did any aspirates go astray?" he inquires when asking the opinion of a friend

about one of his broadcasts. But on paper his style is all that can be asked of a diarist or writer of letters—pungent, conversational and concise. The character sketches of contemporaries, spontaneous products of personal contact, are both striking and convincing.

Thus Lord Lothian "had an oratorical temperament and delighted in communicating a profusion of opinions and ideals to any casual group of listeners, in elevated abstract diction, dealing only with matters of major importance, and influenced by the country and the company he had most recently visited, America, Germany, leaning now to the Right, now to the Left, but returning to a central Liberalism and a theocratic democracy, which made me often think of Laménais and Lacordaire. Had he not broken with Rome he would have gone high in the hierarchy: religion was his dominant interest, and once he crossed the Christian Science threshold, he never seemed embarrassed by the difficulties of his new faith and enjoyed, or seemed to, an absence of critical introspection."

An analysis of the psychological difficulties which beset Lawrence of Arabia, a growing realisation that something would have to be done about Mrs. Simpson, doubts of Edward the Eighth's capacity for kingship, are set down or



LLOYD GEORGE, ADOLF HITLER
Tea at Berchtesgaden

noted along with estimates of the possibility of Lloyd George returning to office, revelations of what really went on at Cliveden, comments on Ramsay MacDonald's increasing confusion of thought, or Baldwin's growing inertia.

Dr. Jones has discussed revolution with Maisky, spent a weekend in Rib-

entrop's garrulous company, and been present at the interview at Berchtesgaden between Hitler and Lloyd George. Few men can have enjoyed such opportunities of observing the influence of personalities upon the course of history, or at least few with Dr. Jones's aptitude for perceiving the essence of a given situation and anticipating its outcome. A 20th Century Greville, he knew everybody who counted; a retired civil servant without political ambitions he was consulted and confided in by statesmen. If one accepts the claim that "what matters most in history is not what happened, but what people said about it when it was happening," this book is a historical document of supreme importance. If one merely seeks entertainment it is surely to be found in good measure in these gleanings of a highly-privileged observer.

MURDER AT MAUNGATAPU

DEATH ROUND THE BEND, by J. Halket Millar; R. W. Stiles and Co., Nelson, through A. H. and A. W. Reed, Ltd., 16/-.

THERE was little bushranging in New Zealand, and most of it consisted of one gang's murders as foul as any crime for gain in history. It may be wondered if the story of the Maungatapu murders, when five men were killed in cold blood on a bush road to Nelson, is worth telling through 200 pages, but if crime is not interesting, the mind of the criminal may be. J. Halket Millar, author of that excellent book *High Noon for Coaches*, gives us the story from the



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