

one of thinness. Though they are real—acutely, humorously and wisely observed—they create no reverberations outside themselves, and compared with the vitality of the people in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or *Look Back in Anger*, they are insubstantial. And I found the end, where Baby Doll, and her lover, Vacarro, hide in a tree, while the demented husband, Archie Lee, mad with thwarted passion, shoots out blindly and kills Baby Doll's crazy old aunt, heartless and pointless. If it is decadent, I find it here, though not elsewhere. It will be interesting to see whether the film with its greater visual impact will confirm or modify these impressions.

INDIAN CHIEF

LONG LANCE: *The Autobiography of a Blackfoot Indian Chief, Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance; Faber and Faber, English price 12/6.*

WITHOUT the introduction by Irvin S. Cobb this book would arouse suspicions. I accept Mr Cobb's assurance that it is "authentic history," but I do not accept it easily. My difficulty is to believe that everything I read about Indians when I was a boy was true. Fennimore Cooper could have drawn this portrait if there had been an Indian in his day who had attended a university, been offered (and refused) an appointment to West Point, and having enlisted as a private in the Canadian forces returned from a World War as a captain of volunteers, "his body covered with wounds and his breast glittering with medals." If such a man had existed in Cooper's day, this is the kind of picture he might have drawn of the boy that became that man: of his early training and hardship; his initiation as a warrior; his hunts, battles and raids; his contacts with missionaries; the dawning of the new day. It is all interesting, and some of it is exciting. But if it comes from the pen of an Indian who was well advanced in years before he "mastered the white man's learning," who was, and is, a chief, and who can still point to medicine men "possessed of powers which no one has ever been able to explain," the journey from the old day to the new has been brief, rapid, and dramatic.

—O.D.

THE COLD SEA

ARCTIC CONVOY, by Taffrail; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 16/.

CONVOYS carried to North Russia 428 million pounds worth of supplies. Britain alone sent 5218 tanks, 7411 aircraft, 4020 vehicles and more than 450 million rounds of ammunition, besides industrial plant and food valued at over 50 million. Of the four million tons sent from the U.K. and the U.S. during 1941-5, only 7½ per cent was lost.

Those are the cold facts, but the Arctic was the coldest fact of all. In the face of surface, submarine and high and low level air attack the Royal Navy lost two cruisers and 17 other ships, with 2055 officers and ratings. Many good accounts, official and unofficial, have been given of the 41 convoys, and Taffrail has now entered the field with all the facts dressed up in the bizarre uniform of fiction. It is odd that he should have done this: Taffrail commands a great deal of affectionate respect in the navy, and this is certainly the best and most comprehensive picture of our efforts to keep faith with our ally. Why, then, has he chosen to

frame it badly as a novel? "My name is John Jasper Satterthwaite Rust, and I'd joined the R.N.V.R. as a midshipman in 1930. . . . Oh, dear, and all his relatives are admirals and commodores and the girl we mercifully lose to the enemy is High Army, and this silly officer is always asking his servant, A/B Swallow, what the ship is about to do, which gives rise to a great deal of lugubrious humour which Taffrail (never there himself) has for so long so fondly imagined as true lower deck talk. But apart from the awful snobbery and the genteelisms as patent as elastic-sided boots, Taffrail tells the whole stark story. As a sailor he knows what he is writing about. He sees the strategy, he evaluates the tactics, and he does not over-write the stolid heroism of it all. While there is sea there will always be ships. Both have had worse chroniclers than Commander Tapprell-Dorling.

—Denis Glover

GUSTO AND GUMPTION

ALL ABOUT OURSELVES, and Other Essays, by J. B. Priestley, chosen and introduced by Eric Gillett; Heinemann, English price 21/-.

A MAN who, in an exceptionally large output, can write *The Good Companions*, *The Linden Tree*, *Midnight on the Desert*, two volumes in the English Men of Letters and other books of criticism, and a pile of essays, illustrates exuberantly the English tradition of versatility. No doubt among J. B. Priestley's admirers preference goes to each of these classes, but there will be a general welcome for this selected edition of his essays, which range from 1922 to 1949.

There is a strong connection between Priestley's versatility and the success that leads Eric Gillett to place him among the great English essayists. He is interested in everything. Here, to pick out a few items, he moves from Shakespeare and Dickens to "vulgar optimists," trying new kinds of tobacco, dingy hotels, music at the Albert Hall, a swindling door pedlar, conjuring and the "malice" of the portrait camera. Here are the familiar wit and humour and gusto. The subject may seem too dull for words, but the dust is beaten out of the carpet in lively fashion. A description of a moth-eaten, time-chipped comfortable hotel bedroom in the Midlands shows brilliantly what can be done with drab detail. Priestley is a superb reporter, one of the greatest since Dickens.

Gusto is like oxygen; you can have too much or too little. Priestley's high spirits, his readiness to shout "Bravo!" contrast refreshingly with the tight-lipped, grudging analysis of some critics, and behind his enthusiasm is a fine critical equipment.

A good essayist must be personal and communicative; he must establish a friendship. Bracketing Priestley with Max Beerbohm, while Max was alive, Eric Gillett notes that "two of the supremely good broadcasters are also the best contemporary English essayists." But don't try to make a meal of this delightful harvest of the years. Keep it for dipping into.

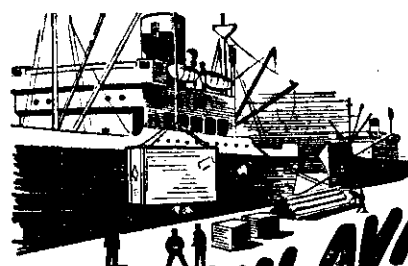
—A.M.

THE INNOCENT EYE

ONE FOOT IN EDEN, by Edwin Muir; Faber and Faber, English price 10/6.

EDWIN MUIR is one of the old stages of contemporary English poetry. The gold rush of the Thirties came and went; he stayed with pick and basin fossicking in his private claim. For those who want quick returns from poetry, novelty, noise and panache.

(continued on next page)



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