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Books

THE FRIENDLY VISITOR

TEN STARS SOUTH OF ASIA, by Don Taylor; Robert Hale, English price 16/-

(Reviewed by D. W. McKenzie)

MR TAYLOR is editor of the *New Commonwealth*, and this book is a record of a trip through Australia and New Zealand to Fiji, a record of what the people there said to him, and what he thought about it. Inevitably his main theme refers to relations within the Commonwealth, particularly between Great Britain and what the dust cover calls the Dominions.

I have read the book with great care, the New Zealand section three times, because the opinions of an outside observer on one's own country are worth the greatest consideration. It has been said that New Zealanders don't like criticism, but lap up praise. I have yet to meet a people that doesn't. But if personal experience is anything to go on, I have heard more biting, and more continuous criticism of our country from its own people than I have ever heard from visitors. Mr Taylor's praise made me feel a little uncomfortable; are we really such a pleasant people?

On closer reading some things become a little disquieting. Mr Taylor is a journalist, certainly, but he reflects far too strongly the opinion of newspaper editors, of whom he saw a good deal. Now editors have an occupational disease—omniscience—whose chief symptom is a tendency to think that what they read in their own editorials is the truth. The author, I fear, gives the opinions of editors too much weight. Again, his description of people one knows personally are twice as large as life and three times as dramatic—but then, of course, he's a journalist. In fact, he seems to have met a not very representative collection of New Zealanders in that the "man in the street" hardly

appears at all, which makes a strong contrast with the variety of people he met in Australia.

Having made these criticisms I should like to point out that Mr Taylor puts his finger on one or two of our many weaknesses. In several places he mildly castigates our passion for conformity—"a marked tendency to elevate integrity and decency to high office, in preference to brains and energy." He gives a great deal of attention to what we think of Great Britain, both directly in our trade relations and indirectly in what we think of her leadership in the Commonwealth, by quoting extensively opinions he collected from New Zealanders, some of them very revealing. He seems always just a little too kind to us, however.

It seems a pity that the proofs have obviously not been seen by a New Zealander, who would have corrected the errors in names, which are far too many. He might have also pointed out such mistakes as calling a tiny hill in a photo of cattle Mt Ruapehu.

If *The Listener* were printed on asbestos paper I would ask the Editor to print my opinion of the pitiful travesty of a map of New Zealand which appears on page 116, for which ordinary language is quite inadequate. But if this leaves me speechless, what can I say about the map on page 69, which shows Australia superimposed on Europe to show Australia's vast areas and small population compared with those of another continent. The most elementary thing in drawing such a double map is that both areas should be on the same scale. This elementary fact doesn't trouble Mr Taylor, who blithely draws Europe and Australia on two completely different scales, so as to make Australia 70 per cent bigger than she should be! Moreover, if such a comparison is to mean anything, comparable areas must be superimposed—the heart of Australia can only be compared with the Sahara, and to put it over rich Europe can only result in a completely wrong idea being given of population density.

The first section of the book is on Australia, and appears to me very much better, though an Australian might see it differently. Mr Taylor seems to have sampled Australians much more widely than he has New Zealanders, and he tackles their weaknesses a little more vigorously than he does ours, which makes for better reading.

MAN AGAINST MYTH

GOODBYE TO UNCLE TOM, by J. C. Furnas; Secker and Warburg, N.Z. price 30/-

THIS book is both the case history of a myth and a devastating example of literary demolition. The myth is that of African "racial" inferiority and Mr Furnas's target is the hapless, humble ghost of dear old Uncle Tom.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was probably the most influential second-rate book ever written. By 1852, the year it was published, slavery was already an emotional obsession in America, regardless of economic factors. Northern preachers, abolitionists and newspaper editors elevated the book to the status of Holy Writ; Uncle Tom Shows broke out like a rash in every

fairground, church hall and repertory barn in the country. And how they persisted! For well over 50 years after slavery was abolished, audiences from San Francisco to Birmingham and Budapest to Hokitika absorbed this curious blend of Victorian genetics, Christian charity, caste consciousness and incoherent mumbo jumbo.

Today the show is ended, but the malady lingers on: the myth of *oncle-tomerie* has survived to infect one of the most urgent social problems of our time. In *Goodbye to Uncle Tom*, Mr Furnas undertakes to show us what slavery really was, and what Negroes really are. This is a large order by any standards, but he cuts through the tangle of racial prejudice and romantic illusion with razor-sharp wit and the deftness of a surgeon. The book moves from Colonial times down into the Deep South, north along the famous Underground Railroad and out on tour with the travelling Tommers. It concludes with a brief survey of the Negro problem in the light of modern anthropological and educational research.

This is no cut-and-copy job, but a sparkling original work, packed with fascinating anecdotes and buttressed by an impressive documentary background. Where the specific source is not given, controversial statements are attributed either to Negro or pro-slavery sources, as the case may be. *Goodbye to Uncle Tom* is as timely and significant as it is readable.

—Henry Walter

NICE OR NASTY?

STARS AND MARKETS, by Sir Charles Tennyson; Chatto and Windus, English price 21/-; OLD FRIENDS, by Clive Bell; Chatto and Windus, English price 21/-

WHEN we read a volume of reminiscences by someone still alive about people still alive or recently dead, what do we expect? Or rather, what do we enjoy? Long lists of "I met so-and-so" and "What my grandfather said," and "Committees I have served on," or wit and grace and skill even if they are sometimes exhibited at the expense of other people and perhaps even at the expense of the literal truth? If you like the first, there is Sir Charles Tennyson. He tells of his boyhood, his visits to his grandfather (who was the Tennyson), his education in the fabulous days at King's College, Cambridge; then the jobs—Government service, big business, high-level conferences and decisions. Sir Charles obviously played a great part in affairs. But he never seems to tell you anything. Even when he moved to his biggest job, he just says he "took a position" with the Dunlop Rubber Company. He emerges as an able and a kind man. I'd like to know him. But not as a writer.

Clive Bell, on the other hand, probably would terrify me if I met him. He is obviously snobbish, culture-conscious. He'd make me feel like an outsider, (continued on next page)

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