

is led by a committee of dreamers and grandfathers (whose faltering steps are hampered by an irresponsible and ignorant opposition) finds itself confronted by new nations of immense strength, led by young and ruthless men, whose fingers are itching to pick our pockets.

"England, it would appear, no longer cares about England. With equanimity the majority of the population has witnessed the destruction of London, and its transformation into the shoddiest capital in the world. With sangroid we tolerate squalid conditions which the authoritarian States, with their empty treasuries, would not tolerate for a month."

Beverley Nichols feels, too, as every other decent man now feels about the Treaty of Versailles: "Those who did not know Germany in 1930, when after despair was written over the face of the land, when the body of every boy and girl was for sale for a piece of bread, will never feel the sense of abiding shame and horror that we, in the name of democracy and peace, should have played our part in the torture gang of Versailles."

"We created Hitler. At the instigation of France, of course, in whose

crazy courses we have obediently followed since the war. We made the advent of Hitler not only inevitable but a part of the common justice of things.

"God knows, we have got ourselves into such a mess that it will need a Divine Power to get us out of it. However, there IS that Divine Power, and we might do a good deal worse than invoke its aid. It is too late for anything else."

NOT a cheerful picture, you say? No, but then it is asking a little much that we, as members of the greatest Empire the world has known, should sing and dance while the menaces from despotic States and power-mad dictators grow daily more insistent.

I'm sorry. . . I meant to write a lot more about Beverley Nichols's book, which is better than most of his, but not as good as his best. He flays many institutions—"Punch," Oxford (always easy prey), civil aviation, London society. He praises several things—the British ballet, the BBO and a dress designer named Norman Hartnell.

You'll find "News of England" as up-to-the-minute as the latest European crisis.

"News of England," by Beverley Nichols (Jonathan Cape). Our copy from the publishers.

TRASH THAT ESCAPES THE CENSOR

(O)f all bad novels, those are most detestable which may be called the "sugared sex books." Their theme is "bodily union" and their detail is entirely unimportant. They slither past the censor only because, as literature, they are so trashy that no one with intelligence can be bothered to read them.

No banned D. H. Lawrence work ever carried one-hundredth part the dose of mischief which these literary pills possess. For these are sold in open market and swallowed without understanding by a thousand million readers—readers who are drugged to believe that love is "bee-utiful" and who go searching in their own lives for a "fulfilment" that is humanly impossible and in any case, outside of novelist trash, would be far too sugary sweet to be tolerable.

The French, who are realists and wise men, condemn most English romantic stories as immoral because they build false values. And a book like Norma Lorimer's "Where Ignorance is Bliss," which the dust cover proclaims as the "daring story of three lovers," is commonplace proof that the French are right. There is nothing that could not be read aloud in an early Victorian drawing-room—the fornication is all done with fig-leaves—but if ever a book in cumulative effect justified banning this does.

One last word. Curious people who are led by vituperative reviews to expect a spicy tale will be horribly disappointed here. There isn't even any salt. Indeed the best comment on the book is its own—where ignorance is bliss. . . .

"Where Ignorance is Bliss," by Norma Lorimer. (Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., London). Our copy from the publishers.

FINE MATERIAL, BUT TOO MUCH OF IT

ALTHOUGH Theun de Vries's third novel has been published in the English translation under the title of "Son of Rembrandt," it might just as reasonably have held to the original Dutch, "Rembrandt"—or, for that matter, "Daughter of Rembrandt" or "Friend of Rembrandt." The truth is, this book contains the skeleton of about five novels all squeezed into one body.

That constructive weakness is likely to damn its chances of popularity, despite much in it that is stimulating, skilful and even beautiful.

Nevertheless, for the small section of the reading public which is genuinely interested in art and artists, "Son of Rembrandt" is a novel not to be overlooked. For it has a quality of almost passionate sincerity that grips attention. One cannot escape the absurd feeling that this book would probably have been written whether or not there was prospect of a market; it echoes so strongly the author's intense absorption in his subject.

There is no need of the information on the dust cover that Mr. de Vries developed an early passion for painting, that he has written a book of verse and worked in a library before he turned journalist. The care and feeling with which he has drawn the figure of the great Rembrandt, the detailed analysis of the changes in the master's style and mood of painting, the colour and reality of the descriptive passages through the book—all these things reveal the fire of interest which must have made de Vries take artist Rembrandt of all men for his hero.

The early chapters that deal with the famous painter's career and love story—filmgoers will see the Laughton version clearly here—are by far the best in the book, strong both in character delineation and in atmosphere. Interests flags when the lime-light shifts from Rembrandt himself to his somewhat pale and sexless son; from Titus to the strangely unbalanced Magdalena van Loo, who courted him; thence to his friend Jan Swammerdam, the brilliant anatomist whose life was wrecked by an abortive love affair; finally to Rembrandt's daughter Cornelia, who is so much better foundation for a novel than her brother, but who is so summarily dismissed.

Only when the ageing Rembrandt returns to the scene is the strength of the first chapters half recaptured. It is a pity that the fine material and enthusiasm of the book should have been so largely discounted by the author's unwillingness or inability to prune.

"Son of Rembrandt," by Theun de Vries. (Harrap and Co., Ltd., London). Our copy from the publishers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"An Easy Way to Study Astrology," by "Leonis" (Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., New Zealand). Our copy from the publishers.

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