

whom he thought of, then and later, as having little military perception or experience; nor General Eisenhower, of whom he wrote, "No real director of thought, plans, energy or direction. Just a coordinator, a good mixer . . ." Alanbrooke has not changed his opinion ("I should, in the light of all later experience, repeat every word of it"). In fact, only MacArthur, whom he watched from afar, gets undiluted praise ("MacArthur was the greatest general and best strategist that the war produced.").

But more interesting than Alanbrooke's account of his own actions, or his opinions of others, is the total effect of the book: the sum of day-by-day observations of a highly intelligent participant in great events.



FIELD-MARSHAL LORD ALANBROOKE. ". . . a highly intelligent participant in great events."

We are all familiar enough with the broad outlines of the conflict. The diaries illuminate the inner struggles, and give the reader some roughcut gems, e.g., the entry for July 27, 1944: "Should Germany be dismembered or gradually converted to an ally to meet the Russian threat of twenty years hence? I suggested the latter . . . Germany is no longer the dominating power in Europe—Russia is . . . unfortunately this must be done under the cloak of a holy alliance between England, Russia and America. Not an easy policy. . . ."

ALANBROOKE the stiff soldier, the sharp observer, the human being (who wrote these diaries as a continuous letter to his wife) evokes as much interest as the events he describes. It is absorbing reading, and this reviewer begs indulgence for one

final quotation, taken from Alanbrooke's description of the Teheran meeting:

"On one occasion, when Winston was referring to political tendencies in England, he said that the whole political world was now a matter of 'tints' and that England could be said to have now quite a 'pink' look. Without a moment's hesitation Stalin snapped back, 'a sign of good health.' The President finished up by return-

ing to the tint theme and said that the effect of this war would be to blend all those multitudinous tints, shades and colors into a rainbow where their individuality would be lost in the whole, and that this whole rainbow represented the emblem of hope. . . . Finally by 1:30 a.m., I was able to escape to bed."

If only we too could escape; for it is the same play. Only the actors have changed.

The Passing Scene

Et Tu, Mrs. Miniver

JOAN DIDION

IN A FLURRY of genteel publicity the *London Times Literary Supplement* not long ago produced a kind of monument to transatlantic misunderstanding: a special number, its first in five years, on what its editors seemed in good faith to think was *The American Imagination*. "Man's mind makes shorter work of the Atlantic than Comet or Boeing," says the *Times* by way of introduction, in a prose peculiar over here to Bryn Mawr undergraduates and fashion copywriters.

The eighty-four pages that follow this pronouncement offer ample evidence that the Atlantic is still a long job, man's mind and BOAC notwithstanding. Most of the twenty-eight pieces, all unsigned in the *Times* tradition, are an indelibly British blend of gross clichés, vapidness, and startling misconceptions about the nature of American experience—one more round in that old Anglo-French game, *Understanding America*.

The *Times*, let it be understood at the outset, sees "grounds for hope in the American situation," one of the grounds being that "most of the presidential possibles in this year are college graduates and Governor Rockefeller of New York was, among other things, a distinguished soccer-player at Dartmouth." But Rocky is, as it were, a soccer-player in the wilderness. Because according to the *Times*, *mon semblable, mon frère*, you and I live in a wasteland left by Materialism and the "sinister results of McCarthyism," national blights which reach their apotheosis in that bad-

land known in infamy from Brighton north as The American Mid-West.

The American Mid-West is where an architect referred to by the *Times* as "Lloyd Wright" did some building around the "roaring Yankee city" of Chicago—that's an Indian name, Chicago—and where the natives say quaint things like "visited with" when they mean "chatted with one's neighbor"; just as The American South is the place that "creates a schizophrenia in all thinking persons." That's all the geography anybody needs to know, although the *Times* does ask its readers to consider that America has "nearly enough desert to make a country as big as England," a conception of The American West that should for once render Walter Prescott Webb speechless, since the whole of Great Britain fits into the State of Nevada with some 15,000 square miles to spare. As one of our own boys, Allan Ginsberg, says in the *Times*' lead poem—and it's something of a surprise to see him in that particular slot—"money has reckoned the soul of America." (The poem is called "Death to Van Gogh's Ear." God alone knows what reckoned the soul of Mr. Ginsberg.)

After giving *The Best Mind of Our Generation* his say, the *Times* turns to Miami Beach, where one can "recognize above a mink stole the face of undeceived America." "Is it the great good place?" queries the *Times*, "the American Dream? The American hell?" No use your saying *hell no*, just a little *spa for the garment district*, because the *Times* had its an-

swer ready all along: "Miami Beach, enshrining the reality within the American Dream . . . is in effect the ultimate creation of the world of American advertising." Dat Ole American Dream turns up again in the *Times*' observations on the hero in American films, a gentleman who "never appears to read anything"—imagine the absorbing fun to be had watching Rock Hudson read for a few hundred frames—"and has no interest whatsoever in anything that concerns the mind. His ambitions are puerile and his morals a mess . . ."

All of us, for that matter, are pretty messed up over here; one way that the *Times* caught on to "how disturbed and unsatisfied" Americans are was by observing the success of Lillian Roth's *I'll Cry Tomorrow*. America is, however, on the crest of a "new literate concern with the Deity," a phenomenon signified by the appearance of *J.B.* and *The Crucible* ("which can be seen now removed from the McCarthy context in which it was written"), as well as by the poems of "Peter Viereck, Phyllis McGinley, John Ciardi (poetry editor of the *Saturday Review* and a great influence on the younger men) and Robert Lowell." (Who can help marvelling at the mind that hit upon making Robert Lowell the fourth member of that particular quartet? Odd man out!)

The *Times* can always tell an American, "for all his optimism and material success," by the guilt he bears for *The Indian*. Indian-guilt is what westerns are all about, in case you had any doubt about that, and I think somebody—maybe Budd Schulberg—better get the word out to the fast guns. It does allow as how westerns have become "more complex and introspective" as America moved "out of the era in which she could rely to a great extent on the fact that British naval power was supreme"—which is an interesting interpretation that dates the "adult western" circa 1918.

THIS SPECIAL NUMBER is just as searchingly perceptive about other forms of American life. On politics: Catholicism is still Senator Kennedy's greatest handicap, "greater even than his eggheadedness, although he has written a book, and an excellent one at that." I guess you hadn't thought of Smilin' Jack as one of the minds of our time, but then you probably hadn't given much attention to Gov-

ernor Rockefeller's soccer game, either. On art: the decline of social realism is due to "the fright given to intellectuals"—poor dears—"by McCarthyism, a spectre that has by no means vanished from the scene."

So it goes, for eighty-four pages (padded by some pretty pompous advertisements from American publishers), and the only opportunity passed by anywhere was by one writer who based a witticism en

passant on his misapprehension that the Hotel Mark Hopkins in San Francisco was named for the end-of-a-log educator instead of for the robber-baron treasurer of the Central Pacific, thereby missing a pound-sterling chance to say something meaty about Materialism, Morality, and/or The American Dream, all at one crack. But that, after all, was inadvertent; everything considered, it was distinctly a good show.

Movies

Operation Ben-Hur

FRANCIS RUSSELL

THE CHARIOT RACE I should have picked was the one my Aunt Dorothy saw in 1903 at Portland's Jefferson Theater. It took carpenters six weeks to remodel the stage for the treadmills that alone cost \$15,000. *Ben-Hur*'s advance publicity hit the Maine seaport like a nor'easter. Such things had never been seen in Portland before—the shipwreck, the hundreds of dancing Roman maidens, the 25,000 candlepower shaft of light in the last scene to symbolize the appearance of Christ.

The climax was of course the race. When the two chariots, each with four horses, thundered down the treadmills as the panoramic background unrolled behind them, first Ben, then Messala, then finally Ben inching ahead, Aunt Dorothy said those chill state-of-Mainers stood up and cheered. The treadmills made so much noise you couldn't hear the drivers shouting—but you could smell the horses! Then there was that race in the Colonial Theater in Boston, unique in theatrical history, when a treadmill stuck and Messala (William S. Hart) won. I myself saw the 1926

silent film version with Ramon Novarro as a bug-eyed Ben-Hur and Francis X. Bushman as the villainous Messala. Beyond the chariot race I don't remember much. My most defined impression is still that climactic moment when Francis X. Bushman took his whip as the chariots surged round the curve and let Ramon have it right in the kisser.

But for the chariot race *Ben-Hur* would, I expect, be as forgotten now as the Biblical hit, *The Shepherd King*, that succeeded it at the Jefferson. The race has always been the peg on which to hang the rest of the melodrama. Without it I doubt if there would ever have been a silent film version, to say nothing of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's present \$15,000,000 super-to-end-all-super production.

William Wyler's current *Ben-Hur* has the race to end all chariot races. In book reviewers' lingo this is the definitive edition. It lasts forty-seven minutes, and there are nine four-horse chariots (the book merely had six). I must admit that the thirty-foot statues in the *spina* around which the chariots whirled reminded me not

