

The Surviving Empire

THE BRITISH EMPIRE. By Stephen Leacock. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company. 1940. 263 pp., with an index. \$2.

GREAT BRITAIN: An Empire in Transition. By Albert Viton. New York: The John Day Company. 1940. 352 pp., with an index. \$3.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

THE stock of the British Empire, in American public opinion, has been of recent months most irregular. After Norway and the first days of the German invasion of the Low Countries it reached a new low: people began to talk of it as ready for liquidation. Since Dunkirk, it has come back somewhat. These two books are therefore most apt, for they remind the intelligent reader that the British Empire is an extraordinarily complex institution, that it has weathered all kinds of military disasters, and that its fate is not likely to hinge on any single campaign—not even a German *Blitzkrieg*. It has taken years to build the British Empire. Perhaps that Empire is in decline, but the decline will also take years. Your newspaper will no more be able to tell you when the British Empire falls than Gibbon himself can tell you when the Roman Empire fell.

These books will, however, help you to judge the present state of the British Empire. Both Mr. Leacock and Mr. Viton agree in their conclusion, that the Empire will survive the present crisis. The conclusion, however, is about

all the two books have in common—and Mr. Leacock's conclusion is rather implied than explicit.

Mr. Leacock writes informally and easily, letting his humorist self pierce pleasantly through his economist and political scientist self. His history, statistics, and geography are all pleasantly seasoned and agreeably served. He is aware of the problems confronting the Empire, and modest and tentative in offering his solutions. His tone may be a bit offensive to American readers not already predisposed to love the English. It is the tone of a sweetly reasonable Kipling: the "Recessional," adapted to the manner of the after-dinner speech.

Mr. Viton's book is a much more substantial piece of work, a critical analysis of the workings of an institution he diagrams in concentric rings: the inner ring, Great Britain itself; then the Colonial Empire proper, mostly in the tropics, mostly directly administered from London; the Indian Empire, administered in a dozen different ways, but still substantially controlled from above by a British minority; the Dominion Empire, completely self-governing: the outer Empire, states like Tibet, Egypt, the Portuguese colonies, over which Britain has very real control, if not actual sovereignty; finally, the Financial Empire, including most of Scandinavia and South America, over which in normal times Great Britain's money power assures a very real political influence.

This huge agglomeration Mr. Viton



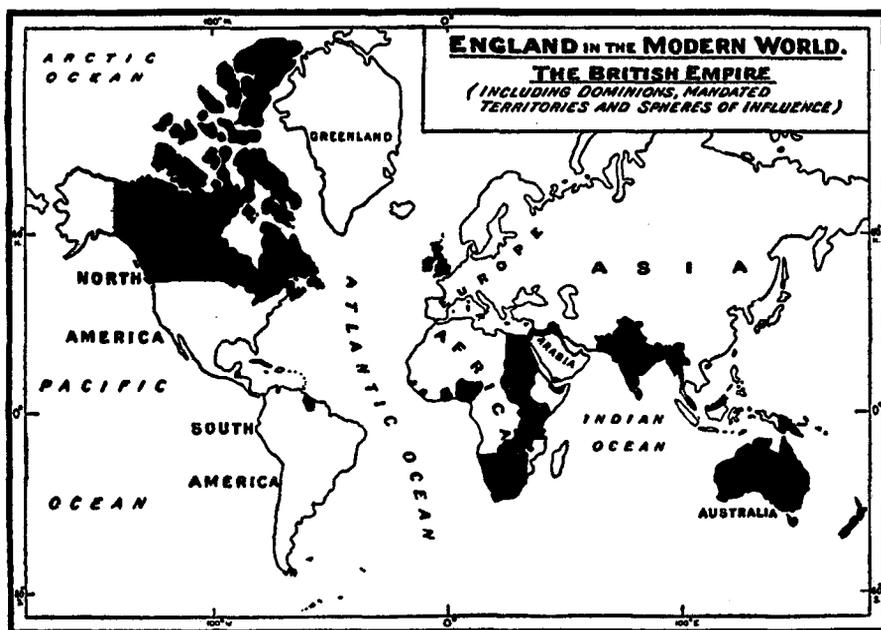
Stephen Leacock writes informally and easily.

has studied carefully from contemporary sources. His description sounds pessimistic, but that is merely because he measures British achievement by a very high, human, other-worldly standard. There is poverty, over-crowding, disease, and all the other social evils in Trinidad and Nigeria. "Indirect rule" by black chieftains is avoidance of responsibility by the British. India is seething with rebellion, and understandably, since Indian poverty is incredible, and the British have done little to solve social problems. White Australia is defenseless against the Japanese. And so on, in the tone rather oddly known in America as "liberal." Yet Mr. Viton thinks the French, Italians, and Germans are much worse rulers of alien peoples: and in spite of his criticisms, he entitles his last chapter "The Empire Will Not Die."

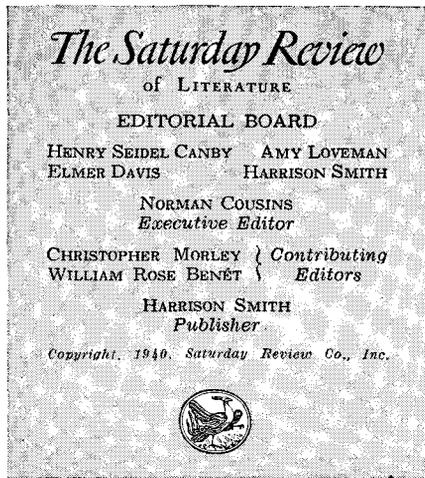
Crane Brinton, of the department of History at Harvard University, is the author of "The Anatomy of Revolution."

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Great Britain is more than an island; it is a body of nations which will have to be conquered before the Empire is beaten.



WHAT CAN BE SAID TO THE YOUNG?

NO book, or library, will give to the Commencement speaker this year infallible advice for the young. If he tells the gathered graduating class of a high school just what they should do to save their country, he will be only exercising the ancient oratorical privilege of omniscience. What has happened to the world is clear enough. Its social controls—religion, philosophy, morality, the practice of the humanities and the arts have lagged behind our technological advances. We are children given guns, with which, untaught, we shoot our brothers. Why and how this has happened many are eager to explain; and though their theories differ, more than one may be correct. But what to do about a world situation which will not wait for preaching—that, except for the immediacies of self-defense, is in the mists.

But this much—and it is not little—may be said to young people of the oncoming generation who—if they are Americans—have probably some years ahead in which it will be their job to learn how to live, and if possible lead, in a twentieth century where the best trained experts, the most well meaning men, the finest technologists will be the slaves of a despotism if they do not learn how to keep government the servant, not the master, of the people. The knowledge, if not the wisdom, which can produce a better world-order, or certainly a better and stronger and safer order in a country which, like the United States, controls a continent, is already available. It is part of that higher education in economics, statecraft, psychology, sociology, yes, and literature and philosophy, in which the older generation has failed to find the necessary vitamins. The right answers to the right questions are undoubtedly implicit in the studies of human relations of the last twenty years, which

have progressed incredibly; just as an increased control of nature was implicit in the brilliant discoveries in science of the nineteenth century. The young student with, say, four years of college ahead of him, does not himself have to invent new materials of education. Unused possibilities of both new and old knowledge are in every university curriculum. It is not so much what to do in the distribution of wealth, in the balancing of production and consumption, in the restriction of war, that is in real doubt. It is how to do it. Clearly the right questions have not been asked, since the answers even when intelligent, have been often futile.

Often, but not always! The remarkable fact about the disastrous tens, twenties, thirties, and forties of this century, is that never in the history of the world has progress, real progress, in many fields been so rapid. If there is to be a millenium, then in health, sustenance, transportation, communication of minds, shelter, distribution of goods, we have been more rapidly constructive in its pursuit than any era of ten times the length of ours. If the fifth century Roman seeing a Europe of exhausted soil, with a slave system breaking down, and the means of civilized life becoming yearly more difficult to obtain, had every reason to be a pessimist, the same cannot be said for an American of 1940. He knows what *may* happen in a world breaking down into violence and despotism because its civilization could not keep up with the effects of the industrial revolution. But

he also knows what *can* happen, and, specifically, what can be done in an America forced to reorganize a nineteenth century economic system to fit the facts, and to revitalize a traditional democracy by the use of gains in knowledge made under its freedoms, though escaped from its inadequate controls.

We can tell all this to the young, but we cannot, unfortunately tell them what questions they must ask in order to get the answers they will so bitterly need. It is their job to find out before their time of action comes. That will be the education of the best young people going from schools to college or universities this year. No matter how the headlines flare, it is probable that, for the next few years anyhow in the United States, the boys and girls of sixteen to twenty will seek what we sought in higher education—social contacts, a good time, knowledge, and professional efficiency. But they will have to do more if the next American generation is going to do better with the controls of technology and of human nature than we did. We invented the tractor and got the tank. We invented the airplane, and may lose our cities. We invented the radio, and have mass propaganda. Somebody has to ask why, and get answers that can be put to work. The young must ask them, for it is the young who must do the work when their time comes. That is their job for the next few years. That is what our generation can honestly, and not un- hopefully, tell them.

H. S. C.

That We Survive

Melville Cane

IN this black hour,
When skies are dark with hate,
And sweet green earth lies prostrate, charred and sere;
When the crazed savage smashes at the gate,
Ravishing all we hold most dear;
In this so cruel and portentous hour,
In spite of every outward sign
Of ruin and of holocaust,
All's not lost.
Believe!
Believe!
That fire itself is helpless to devour
Or undermine
The treasure of the spirit.
Believe!
Be brave—
That we survive
Though all that world we loved be left a grave!