

"Wully" (Sir William Robertson, the second vital figure in the book), the formula had been watered down, it left the position too delicately poised for permanence.

In his introduction Mr. Churchill attempts to offset the criticism of Mr. Lloyd George by introducing the facts of Russia's falling out of the War and America's entry into it. But both were subsequent to the Prime Minister's decision. If it be true that "the means for a successful offensive in 1917 did not exist," it is not particularly convincing to suggest that Nivelle's offensive was to be carried out by French troops, since the first proposals at Calais might have fatally involved the British Army in its failure. As it was, we suffered much in the sequel. It would seem more reasonable to conclude that the Prime Minister, not long in the saddle, had not then so experienced a hand on the reins. In the second phase of these delicate discussions it is clear that his action was much less open to criticism.

These problems are not directly posed by General Spears, but everywhere they pierce through his story. The relations of politicians and soldiers, and of soldiers of one race to those of an ally, are merely aspects of the human side of the War which dominates all mechanism and material; and human nature, in times of crisis, reacts in a way that by normal standards is incalculable. In the strains set up by the War the strategy of an ally may be less objectionable than his stance or stature. Nivelle would consider no view but his own. He fascinated, but could not impose discipline on his own subordinates. But to the British Commander-in-Chief and his staff, temperamentally so different, all Nivelle's faults lay bare. His obstinate refusal to face the facts made them fear the worst—and, in the event, the worst happened.

General Spears' story has some of the atmosphere of great tragedy. The human actors, with their qualities, their errors and their malice, carry the spectator through the victory of Arras and the poignant scenes in the territory abandoned by the Germans to the climax in the follies, the terrors and the misery of the battle of the Aisne. It is an impressive canvas.

STRATEGICUS.

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De Profundis

By LEONARD WOOLF

Labour and the War

By "POLITICUS"

Uncle Silas

My Uncle Silas. By H. E. Bates. (Jonathan Cape. 10s. 6d.)

MR. BATES'S Uncle Silas made his bow some five or six years ago—a crusty, tipping reprobate, devoted to his garden—in a short story called *The Lily*. At intervals other aspects of his character were developed in further sketches and stories, and now he makes an imposing appearance as the subject of a collection of fourteen tales, of which about half are new. In a short preface Mr. Bates describes the origins of this many-sided character, whom he now reveals himself, as one had rather imagined, to have drawn from the life. His name was Joseph Betts, and he lived in a part of that wooded Midland country—to be precise, in Bedfordshire—which is the setting of almost all Mr. Bates's best writing. He was Mr. Bates's great-uncle, and these stories derive either from Joseph Betts's own mouth, or from Mr. Bates's childhood recollections, or from the fond legends with which the reputation of every rural character worth the name in time becomes encrusted. Uncle Silas certainly deserved a book to himself, and Mr. Bates was wise to choose a series of stories rather than a novel in which to set him. It would be difficult for the most gifted novelist to avoid making a lush family portrait out of such a figure; using the form of the short story, Mr. Bates is like a photographer able to snapshot his model from a number of different angles. Seen from a dozen places, Uncle Silas remains much more vivid and alive than he would have been set formally in a solid frame.

It is true that some of the stories, read by themselves, would seem a little thin—*Stas* and *Goliath*, for example, an illustration of Silas's inventiveness in the form of a description of how he challenged and outwitted a boxing champion, which, unlike most of Mr. Bates's work, makes all its effect on the surface; or *The Race*, which is similar in theme and illustrates Silas's craftiness even more emphatically. But even these—the two weakest stories—contribute something to the general effect which the book as a whole creates—a picture not only of a single character, but of a way of life and of a countryside. These stories are not published with any pretence that they represent Mr. Bates's most serious work; they are primarily written not to move, but to entertain; but it is Mr. Bates's most enviable gift as a writer that even when he is frankly amusing himself with light exercises the astonishing sensibility which is his particular merit never flags; he shows the commonplaces of country life more clearly, freshly and delicately than they have been shown before, and gives the fantastic and the bizarre precisely their proper emphasis. No other living writer, given an ancestor like Joseph Betts, could have contrived out of his reminiscences such a consistently lively and evocative creation.

My *Uncle Silas* is elegantly produced, and decorated with drawings by Mr. Edward Ardizzone which perfectly match the text. It is an agreeable possession.

DEREK VERSCHOYLE.