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# WITCH-HUNT in the Book Shops

WITCH-HUNTS are not popular in this country; they are, on the whole, repugnant to the English nature.

When, therefore, a group of authors, including among others such men of distinction as Bertrand Russell, Somerset Maugham, Philip Gibbs and Compton Mackenzie, expresses grave concern over something that has much of the appearance of a witch-hunt, then you may have in mind is not a frivolous matter.

The matter, in this case, is obscenity—or more accurately obscenity in books, particularly contemporary books, and the attitude of the law towards those books, their authors and their publishers.

And the reason for concern lies in the fact that the year 1954 has been remarkable for a large increase in the number of prosecutions brought against authors and publishers, in some cases against publishers of long standing and unimpeachable reputation, charging that they have issued literature that is obscene. Still more prosecutions are pending.

This is how the authors express their concern:

"It is, of course, recognized by all decent authors that certain books of an entirely obscene and filthy nature should be condemned and destroyed, but it is equally recognised that that duty of the law should not be allowed to open the way to a puritanical crusade, backed by police-prosecution, against authors who claim the liberty and the right of describing the realities of life, freely and fearlessly, for adult minds."

## Serious Words

Finally they add these significant and serious words:

"It would be disastrous to English literature if authors had to write under the shadow of the Old Bailey."

Earlier in the year it seemed unlikely that words like this would have to be written. For in

## A best-selling novelist H. E. BATES

(*'Fair Stood the Wind for France,' 'The Purple Plain,'* etc.) says 1954's spate of prosecutions of responsible publishers for alleged obscenity affects not only your reading but also your television and radio entertainment.

one of the first, and more widely publicised, of these prosecutions Mr. Justice Stoble gave one of the wisest, most liberal and most adult directions to a jury on the whole subject of obscenity in literature that has ever been given in a court of law. It will long be quoted.

In effect what Mr. Justice Stoble said was this:

First, that words are not written solely for adolescent minds; second that what was thought to be improper in 1860 would not bring a blush to the cheek of a ten-year-old girl to-day; and that what is thought to be immoral or obscene in one county, or even one town, is often con-

sidered as quite innocuous in another.

He also reminded the jury that in recent years we have all—or nearly all—grown up quite a little in matters of sex—and its free discussion.

Unfortunately Mr. Justice Stoble's admirable words were not heeded where it was hoped they would be heeded most—i.e. by some other judges and the Home Office itself. Prosecutions have continued, with the inevitable result that publishers and authors all over the country are now seriously alarmed. They do not care for the shadow of the Old Bailey casting itself over literature.

Now you may well ask, as a member of the public, "What has all this to do with me? What concern is it of mine if authors and publishers do not keep the pages of their books clean?" As an author I feel bound to tell you that it concerns you very much.

## A Strange One

The profession of authorship is a strange one—I will explain why in a moment—but it is also an important one. And it is important not only because it gives you something to read but because it gives employment to a vast number of people. Without authors there would be no printers, no binders, no book-sellers, no agents, no plays, no films, no actors, no theatres, no theatrical managers, no editors, no advertisers, no newspapers, no magazines. Half your radio programmes would be cut, and with them half your television. All these things spring directly or indirectly from the written word.

To suppress literature, therefore is ultimately to suppress them all. But who, you may say, says anything about suppression? I do. I maintain that to institute prosecutions against responsible publishers and authors for alleged obscenity, thus attacking the freedom of the pen is a step towards suppression. To put literature under the shadow of the Old Bailey, the skirts of Mrs. Grundy or the finger of the common informer is the beginning of a censorship that would be folly and disaster.

Yes, you may well say, but obscene?—supposing a book is obscene? To which the answer is really once again from Mr. Justice Stoble. Who is to say what is obscene and not obscene? Have you seen the recent film of "Romeo and Juliet"? If not, I suggest that you do so, listening at the same time very carefully to some words spoken to Juliet by her nurse.

Have you looked lately at "The Canterbury Tales" by Chaucer? If not I daresay your sons and daughters have been doing it, parts of it, for their School Certificate. In any case have a look at "The Miller's Tale."

## Frank Classics

Have you by any chance read "The Journals of Bowdler"? All these and many other classics of our literature, some in common use for the curricula of schools, are franker than the frankest novel of this century.

The freedom of the pen, as Somerset Maugham and his colleagues point out, is something "for which a long and bitter struggle was fought and won in the past." That is one reason why the profession of authorship is a strange one. It is the last of the unorganized professions. It has no trade union, no Equity, no pensions scheme, no arbitration boards, no council of professional etiquette. It is free. And it is free largely because sensible and courageous men in the past believed in the principle that freedom is better than suppression and silence less precious than the censor.

That is why authors and publishers are gravely concerned at this threat to their status. That is why they want the shadow of common informers, police courts, misguided juries and the Old Bailey itself removed from themselves and their work. That is why they are moved to protest, hoping that wiser and more liberal counsels will presently prevail in the administration of the law.



Left to right: Trooper David Bullimore, Trooper Robert Little, Captain Clifton Raymond and S.S.M. Eaton.

# THE LONELY BRIGADE

PUSAN, Thursday.

PERHAPS no British brigade has ever been quite so lonely as that forming part of the Commonwealth Division in Korea.

This loneliness of the Commonwealth Division is not merely physical. With the fighting over, they are no longer troops, no longer active in the sense of military achievement.

Above all they are alone among the Koreans. In no other civilized nation in the world can so little English be spoken or known: physically, emotionally, socially, the Korean is an utterly unsympathetic type to these English and Dominion soldiers.

Korea is remote and rural, unreachably hot for two summer months but just now settling into four months when the nights will fall steadily further and further below freezing point. Now the issue is being made of the most expensive dress ever produced for an English soldier.

The unit's sentries go armed and watchful—against pilferers—up close to the front line and geared, at a couple of hours' notice, for active war again. Meanwhile, however, the lance which Trooper David Bullimore, from Ordnance-road, Enfield, serves stands clean but inactive parked. *Crown News*, duplicated in the camp, delivered up to date on his table at breakfast time, brings him his football results regularly and promptly enough to make him worried for Tottenham Hotspur; nostalgically enough to make him miss White Hart Lane while he watches inter-unit matches on a pitch which has not known a blade of grass since multi-national battle moved over it.

The Army, on five nights of the week, provides five different films inside the camp, but he prefers to listen to the radio—Forces' Broadcasts and, often, relays from England. Does he like Korea? Well, in the Army you take the rough with the smooth; the time passes quickly; now that there is talk of a move he thinks he has rather enjoyed it.

Trooper Robert Little has another year and a half of his five-year period to do before he goes back to his fiancée in Crefield-road, Acton. He is disappointed that he will not be able to see the tennis at Wimbledon and, certainly, Korea can be dull. But a man saves money there—which is important when he is considering marriage. They would prefer to do their

soothing in England? No! Korea will do it is something to have been and to have done; they are not bedside soldiers; they have been across the world. It has had its discomforts but it is an experience which will always make them a little different from the next man when they settle down in England.

Sergeant Major Eaton—his house is at Dares-road, Eltham—says he really is a Londoner but a soldier; he has kicked around the world long enough for the regiment's halt for tonight to be home. Korea, for him, has been easier than most places. Discipline and morale there have been so all the old hands say, much higher than average.

The days are still sunny and windless when the frost passes and the morning mist rises.

Chonhan, Taek, Changjandong, Hagayue, Chudong-ni are small spots on even a large map of Korea. Uchis—"hutches" to the soldier—tiny Korean houses with straw roofs like tatty sun-hats, in clusters of four or five against the rim of mountains, are a far remove from London. Just there, however, a United Nations Army of a wide blend said, meant—and enforced—"halt" to a Communist invasion. Korea is lonely, but it is also the name of an achievement.

JOHN ARLOTT

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