

THE LIBRARY TABLE

THE PARTS MEN PLAY

BY ARTHUR BEVERLEY BAXTER. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

LORD BEAVERBROOK certainly is a sportsman, for he took the sportsman's chance when the author of this universally interesting novel, then but little known as a writer, was discussing with him the possibility of occupying a position on one of Beaverbrook's London dailies. "Do you know anything about newspaper work?" Beaverbrook is reported as having asked. "I haven't had any actual experience," Baxter had to confess. "Then I'll give you a job," said his Lordship. Baxter had published "The Blower of Bubbles" and some good short stories, and being a Canadian, a native of Toronto, with Canadian adaptability, he soon mastered the position (on the staff of *The London Daily Express*), and this novel of international life and affairs soon followed. It is an unusually clever novel. Lord Beaverbrook contributes an estimate of it, and of that estimate we quote the following:

A Canadian lives in a kind of half way house between Britain and the United States. He understands Canada by right of birth; he can sympathize with the American spirit through the closest knowledge born of contiguity, his history makes him understand Britain and the British Empire. He is, therefore, a national interpreter between the two sundered factions of the race.

It is this rôle of interpreter that Mr. Baxter is destined to fill, a rôle for which he is particularly suited, not only by temperament, but by reason of his experiences gained from his entrance into

the world of London journalism and English literature.

I do not know in what order the chapters of "The Parts Men Play" were written but it seems to me that as Mr. Baxter gets to grip with the realities of his theme, he begins to lose a certain looseness of touch which marks his opening pages. If so, he is showing the power of development, and to the artist this power is everything. The writer who is without it is a mere static consciousness weaving words round the creatures of his own imagination. The man who has it possesses a future because he is open to the teaching of experience. And among the men with a future I number Mr. Baxter.

Throughout the book his pictures of life are certainly arresting—taken impartially in Great Britain and America. What could be better than some of his descriptions?

But I fear that I may be giving the impression that "The Parts Men Play" is merely a piece of propagandist fiction—something from which the natural man shrinks back with suspicion. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Mr. Baxter's strength lies in the rapid flow and sweep of his narrative. His characterization is clear and firm in outline, but it is never pursued into those quicksands of minute analysis which too often impede the stream of good story-telling.

I am glad that a Canadian novelist should have given us a book which supports the promise shown by the author of "The Blower of Bubbles" and marks him out for a distinguished future.

If in the course of a novel of action he has something to teach his British readers something about the American temperament, and his American public about British mentality, so much the better.

Mr. Baxter was a lieutenant in the 122nd Canadian Infantry and was transferred to the Canadian Engineers. He went to France with the Signals of the First Canadian Division, and returned invalided, in 1918.