

[*Cornhill Magazine*]

## A WINTER IN THE HEBRIDES

BY GEORGE BLAKE

It is greatly to be feared that many of those good people who in dreams behold the Hebrides are, oftener than not, the victims of false imagination. They dream of stern isles — cheerless, windswept, cold, and peopled by a race of melancholics. The sheilings, they fancy, are always lone, the islands always misty. It is a belief that has been planted in their minds by half a score of novelists, several musicians, and various guide books that attract by citing repulsiveness. Argument is futile; their conviction, like the islands, are of rock. They resolutely decline to believe — for it would be the surrender of a mystical, long-cherished notion — that sunshine, prosperity, and cheerfulness are enjoyed as commonly in the Western Isles as in any other canton of broad Scotland.

I might as well admit — since this is a personal narrative — that three months earlier I was a partisan of this extreme view. Had any friend suggested that the good health I needed so much was to be found in the Isles, I should have written him down forthwith as crazy. Yet that is what someone — good friend that he was — did suggest. And I wrote him down forthwith as crazy. I did not see myself, by a long chalk, moving from the warm Lowlands to shiver in any lone sheiling of any misty isle of the Hebrides, Outer or Inner. Not likely; those Turkish shells may have injured my capacity for sleep: they had left untouched my capacity for clear, cold reasoning. No, and again, no! I protested, I argued, I

swore, I defied, and all that the good friend would do was to persist in his quiet way.

In the end he prevailed, and led me, a skeptical charge, over the gangway of a steamer bound for Cara, 'just by way of an experiment.' (Let us, for the sake of peace, agree to call it Cara.) In the violent throes of the sickness that comes on discharged soldiers who travel by sea, I condemned the best of my friends to a place that is not on the maps. I told him that he was killing me, and the wretch, laughing boisterously, let drift into my hypersensitive nostrils a blast of cigar smoke.

Old soldiers never die, they say. I did not die. Far better, I lived to see Cara as it lay in the blue Atlantic under a September sun. Within two hours I had fallen in love with Cara; for better or for worse, bound by oath to dally there with the coy goddess of Convalescence.

They put me ashore in the ferry-boat, and left me on the beach to sit disconsolate on my piled luggage; as once I had sat — oh! so many years ago! — on a Wolseley valise under the grim shadow of the battered River Clyde. This end of Cara was not so very unlike Gallipoli, now that I could look back with smoke-dimmed eyes and sense with a homesick heart. That hill, with its rocky summit, was not so very unlike Seddul-Bahr, and if only these brackens were replaced by thorn bushes and the rabbit-burrows by shell-holes, why — My reverie was interrupted by the sudden heaving be-

neath me of my cabin trunk. The ham-like fist of the ferryman grappled with one of the leather handles.

'We'll be getting on, now,' he said in soft English, and accepting the hint, I grasped the other handle.

We got on. For one long hour, through wet bracken, over crumbling dikes, over sodden furrows, through muddy streams, we got on. In the end, they heaved me on to a cart that waited where the road began, and drove me two miles to the hotel. At the door of that hostelry they deposited me — as inert as my luggage — to be fed back to life. But what a feeding was that! Scones, good sirs, and fresh-made butter, pancakes, honey, bramble jam — and all in a profusion unknown in areas under the more direct notice of the Food Controller.

I fed well; I fed colossally; I fed posterously. So overwhelming was the feast that only bed seemed a possible destination. And bed was in an attic that looked over the kirk to a blue, rock-studded lagoon, and over that again to the distant mainland. There is no use pretending that sleep came to me that night. It was all far too peaceful for sleep. How could any normal Lowlander be expected to sleep, lacking the lullaby of trains, tram-cars, and automatic riveters? Quite out of the question.

Dawn broke on a haggard figure that mouthed imprecations against war, medical boards, and benevolent friends. A triumvirate of practical jokers they seemed to a tired mind at dawn. I was very bitter. I rose to heights of vituperation that transcended the concentrated efforts of the massed sergeants-major of the British army. But out of anger grew the spirit of defiance. I would defy them — I would show them; I would jolly well show them. In a phrase, I would stick it out or die. Thus comforted, I rose.

There is a pathway that leads from the stackyard — for the hotel is incidentally a farm — to the hill called Creag Bhan, which is the backbone of the island. For ten minutes we follow it, and are surprised at the suddenness of our arrival at the central point between the east and west shores. Cara is so very narrow, so ludicrously narrow; you feel that, from this ridge, stones could be thrown into the ambient Atlantic. They cannot. The Marathon games have not produced a man who could throw stones from Creag Bhan into the Atlantic. Cara at this, its broadest part, measures one mile from shore to shore. At others, the inter-littoral distance is a good furlong. But it is ridiculously narrow. You feel that the next storm will be fraught with the direst possibilities.

Yet Cara is long — six good Scots miles of it from the rocks of the north to the caves of the south, and this backbone of hills runs unbroken through its entire length. It communicates such a feeling as must come upon men on the plateau of Tibet which, they say, is the roof of the world. You want to gambol along its smooth top; you want to shout; you want to sing; you want to snap your fingers at those who must live in flat places. Let me confess at once that I am a slave to these infantile practices. Put me on the ridge, and I feel like a god. I rush through the bracken; I bellow songs — soldiers' songs, love songs, ribald songs, and Hebridean songs; and sometimes I stand silent on my peak in Darien and, unlike the stout and law-abiding Cortez, place my thumb to my nose in impertinent defiance of the world.

For what a place it is! Islands lie low and blue on the seas around me. Over there to the westward is one that is treeless but fertile; to the northward see that fine, rugged one that boasts to the Atlantic of its high peaks. (There

is a fine song about these same Bens. I should have written it myself had not the notion been developed by a Gaelic bard of the sixteenth century.) To the east there lies the dim, hazy, forgotten mainland. And between and among these islands is the sea, the green sea — green because the bottom is of pure silver sand.

Little, attenuated Cara is of itself entrancing. One side, the seaward side, is a fringe of rocks — hard, brown, wonderfully serrated, forbidding; the other, which is sheltered from the winds by the central ridge, is green and pleasant and fertile. It is an island in motley; it is therefore — even to look at from its highest point — an amusing, an enthralling island. It presents the mystery beloved of dreamers, in its rocks and cliff-lined bays, and it offers quite another picture compounded of 'bein' farms, rich fields, a planting of hazel, birch, and oak, interspersed with giant fuchsias, and the worldly interest of a pier at which a steamer calls three times weekly. The entire picture is splendidly framed by the inscrutable sea.

So much for Cara in its general aspect. Only through time and the familiarity of long acquaintance can we hope to absorb its details — such details as the Ogham stone that stands above the ancient burying ground of Kilchattan, the Pigeon Cave which shelters unnumbered hordes of sea birds, the Spouting Cave where the sea appears suddenly in a turnip field, two hundred yards from the shore, the vitrified fort above Ardailly, and the wonderland about Grob Bagh. We must dwell on the island for decades ere the brownies will leap about Cairn-vickoye for our delectation. We have first to make the acquaintance of the three hundred mortals who inhabit Cara, and, after an hour on Creag Bhan, with the whole island beneath

us, we have not seen one. Let us descend toward the cluster of cottages about the eastern bay — let us expand with becoming bonhomie among the prosperous farms.

Here is a likely door; a knock will be no liberty. That it is, indeed, a condescension on our part, the smiling face of the goodwife demonstrates.

'Yes, yes! He iss in. Will you not step in now? Well, well! I will send him out to you.'

You will observe the softness of the accent, the precision of the diction, and the exotic idiom. When they speak in English, these good islanders speak a foreign tongue out of deference to the stranger; they acquired the southern speech at the age of eight or thereabouts, when an all-wise Education Department insisted on regular attendance at the parish school. There is Druimachro himself to substantiate my assertion. (His surname is not Druimachro. He is tenant of the farm called Druimachro. Therefore his title in all the isles is Druimachro.) 'He iss glad to see us, indeed; and, yes, it iss fine, fine weather. The like hass not been seen for years and years. He remembers when he wass a boy another that wass near it for fineness, but yet not so good. Down in the Low Country, now —'

It is difficult to lead Druimachro, or any other islander, from the topic of weather. Nay, leading is an utter impossibility. They must be pushed. But push gently, stranger; the liveli-hood of three hundred souls is wholly dependent on the behavior of the weather.

A whisper of crops is sufficient. Druimachro leaves the weather with a reluctant sigh, and plunges into a dissertation on the recent harvest. You expected him to speak of sea-wrack, scythes, and Harvest Home; and behold him dogmatizing anent super-

phosphates, American binders, and internal combustion in cornstacks! He knows all about it. He has the figures at the tips of his horny fingers. Nitrogenous elements and the mysteries of protein are child's play to him. He rains statistics. He outlines policies. He demolishes the pretensions of the Continuous Cropping School. He quotes — to the third place of decimals — the ruling freights between Cara and the mainland. He deals out shrewd blows at Lord Ernle.

Briefly, he threatens to break the heart of the stranger who was agog for traces of poetic feeling, for ebullitions of sentimentality; who looked for demonstrations of the Second Sight. Let us leave the old fraud; let us calm our troubled souls amid the rocks of the western shore. Druimachro wishes us good day, and commends to our attention the second crop of rye grass in the field by the churchyard.

Leaden-footed, heavy-hearted, and grieved, we trudge along the road. The novelists were wrong. Look at that ploughboy from whose pocket protrudes a packet of Woodbines. Bah! Scotland does not stand where she did.

But softly, good friend, softly. The day is not yet over. Did you reckon on the visitors who came, on that first night, to pay their Highland respects to the stranger? Here is Druimachro in his Sunday suit; mark the rapt manner as he leans on the butt of his long crook, and the fine deference he pays to everything you say. With him have foregathered Ardlamey, and Leim, and Tarbert, and Cairnvickoye — dear old men, they have come to bid you welcome. Druimachro has forgotten his basic slag and his albuminoids; something worthier of an islander's interest has come to cheer him up.

We talk of men and women and their loves, of clans and their quarrels, of

fairies and their happy ploys, of old battles, old shipwrecks, old ways. How the fine, rich talk goes to a man's head! How the heart warms to a realization of the human kindness that haps us so securely! We are happy as we tell our stories; we follow conversational trails with the eagerness of bloodhounds; most moving, we defer to each other. It is the basis of Highland intercourse, this deference. And the rapture that comes on these men! Leim's eyes glow as he recites the love-tale of Colin and his Margot, and Druimachro — whose voice was so hard when he spoke of freights — has a tear on his cheek when it is his turn to tell the tale of Blind Aorig. A warm people, you would say — a lovable race.

These nights — for the first one has been repeated — have shown me the islander as he is; they have helped me to get to the heart of him. I see him now as the novelist saw; through the veneer, that is, through the veneer that has been laid upon him by the Board of Agriculture, progressive Factors, and a Great War. There is a Roll of Honor in the kirk that testifies to their intimate connection with this war on the human side, but it is in their superficial characteristics that its effects are most clearly seen. It has brisked them up for the passing show, and the polish is artificial. Their hearts are not in it — in the war as it is represented to the agriculturist by increased food production. Truly at the core they are an old people, a warm-hearted people, a romantic people. And I, a sophisticated townsman by birth and breeding, am yet sentimental enough to will that they remain so forever and a day.

We have viewed the island through the eye of a bird; we have met the islanders in a spirit of comradeship. Let us now take stock of the institutions. It is an inventory that should not occupy us long, for Cara is dis-

tinguishable from the adjacent islands of Britain and Ireland by its lack of institutions.

We have, for instance, no policeman. If we had, his main function would be to sit on the manse gate, a straw between his teeth, and contemplate the Sound beyond which there are many thriving towns that offer attractions for a progressive constable. Between these spells of duty he might help Old McSpörran with the potatoés. Life for a policeman would be a blank in Cara; he would mope; his soul would turn blue as his uniform.

Be it understood always that I do not insist on the impeccability of society in Cara. Far from it. Why, only four years ago we had a criminal case. It concerned an old lady, a most estimable woman, who in a moment of irritation displayed a too intimate knowledge of the irregularities in a neighbor's ancestry. The neighbor, unfortunately, was a foreigner from another isle. He laid an information, and a warrant was issued, citing the dame to appear at the Sheriff Court on the mainland. She ignored the citation. Within a week a posse of constables arrived from the county town to carry out the ends of justice. She declined to accompany them; she refused to accompany them; she dwells still in Cara unmolested, and pays her rent with laudable regularity. That, I think, disposes of any constabulary claims to a place in the life of the island.

But we have strayed toward exceptions. It is time to consider such institutions as exist.

There is the kirk. Survey the island with whatever care you please, and I defy you to recognize it in a blow of the eye. You will be forced to employ the superior intelligence of a native, and you will exclaim at the fact that what you took for an obsolescent

power house or a very up-to-date barn is veritably the kirk. That square building on the hill beside the hotel is the kirk. You do not recognize the architectural period. No. It is a style peculiar, to Scotland. It is post-Reformation-Heritors'-Gothic. Yet let us not complain; a thousand churches of the kind in Scotland have fostered a faith that is remarkable even to the present day, and we can see for ourselves how strong it is in Cara, how it keeps warm the hearts of a kindly people.

At ten o'clock of any Sunday morning, the male members of Cara society begin to congregate about the door of the kirk. Some sit on the low dike of the Ferry Croft, others stand picturesquequely in the middle of the highway. (It is not the king's highway, but the laird's. It is three miles long.) All of them, whatever their various stances, are particularly regardful of their Sunday suits.

These Sunday suits have character. Some are of blue pilot-cloth, cut — as to the jackets — in double-breasted, sailor fashion; some — note the modern touch — are of dark gray, cut in a fashion that would pass unremarked in Glasgow. But they are all very obviously Sunday suits; the impeccable creases proclaim the fact to the world. Most have hard felt hats; most of the hats have highly distinctive contours. The elders, the slaves of tradition, wear that type of head covering which, in England, is associated with the profession of curate. And, oh! the shine on those black boots! The few women that appear on Sunday mornings are clad in a uniform of black — peculiarly sombre, lustreless black.

I repeat that this gathering takes place about the hour of ten. The service takes place promptly at half-past eleven. This is a rite; it is the weekly conference of the Cara Soviet. They are

here to canvass, during the sole unoccupied hours of the week, the happenings of the week. Their deliberations are conducted in the Gaelic tongue. As spoken in Cara, the Gaelic tongue is of a resonant nature. These people, whose English is so soft, so caressing, are Joves in Gaelic. They bawl. For one hour and a half they have at it thunderously. The crazy tinkling of the kirk bell is only the signal for a general crescendo, and I, whose window looks out upon them, am glad when their voices rumble away through the porch of the kirk on the hill. But even then my troubles are not ended. Their vocalization is more astounding than their speech. For two hours I must listen to sounds within the holy building as of distant cannon. First there is the *soixante-quinze* notes of the precentor as he gives out the line of a Psalm, then comes the howitzer crash of the congregation's repetition. It is full-throated praise, indeed.

The English service of the afternoon is a tamer business. But, still, there are conventions to be observed, and I blush to think that I, on my very first Sunday, should have shattered these so disastrously. It seemed to me then a decorous thing to attire myself in my very best, and I did so with the best motives. It was a grave error. I was indubitably bizarre. The giggling, undisciplined retreat of the choir girls before my approach demonstrated as much. In that gray interior, with its soberly clad congregation, I showed up like the white cows in the Salano targets. The service through, my neck was hot at the thought of the island eyes that distrustfully regarded the polychromatic stranger. But so many attractive things were to be observed that I forgot them for a while.

There were the elders in a row on the bench below the little pulpit, white bearded men who held their books at

arm's length and peered at them as if suspicious. There was the singing of the Hundredth Psalm that opens every service in Cara. There was the tiny wooden gallery in which the laird sat solitary, enthroned, a man apart. There was the agnostic cripple in the choir who attends the kirk only for the sheer delight that some supermen derive from the delivery of a resonant bass. There were the rare old tunes — 'Irish,' 'Coleshill,' 'Martyrs,' and the like. (Not for Cara the modern flimsies that blotch the Psalter in Lowland towns.) And there were the people, so quiet, so essentially simple, so patently devout. It is an education to mark the raptness with which they follow the simple reasoning of their kindly minister. The Auld Kirk is yet a force in Cara.

There is a second institution, more mundane. I speak of the 'fushing.' The twentieth-century Briton will not readily allow that the capture of fish is an institution. Permit me to insist that for Celts — whether by birth or adoption — the taking of lobsters and saithe is most decidedly an institution. The livelihood of three quarters of us, the very sustenance of one half of us, are dependent on the fish of the sea and our capture thereof. Man can exist, after a fashion, without the Church; he is defied to attempt existence without provender. Therefore, I repeat, the 'fushing' in Cara is an institution. (I adopt the local pronunciation.)

There is little science but much excitement in the taking of saithe. Come down to Leim Bay and regard us as we fish. Mark first the splendor of the bay considered as a piece of island landscape. Were ever such rocks as these that are scattered, as if from an omnipotent pouch, over the waters? Was ever sand so silver-white? Did ever caves resound to ocean's pounding as these do? Has the broad Atlantic ever

achieved before a green so remarkable? Were ever brackens on a hillside so splendid in the sunset?

Behold, then, the people of Cara as they fish. They are distributed evenly over the sea rocks that thrust stubborn noses into the waves around the bay, and each one bears in his hand a pole of bamboo to which is attached a short line, garnished with a tawdry penny fly. With this implement, he or she flails the waters. Should nothing accrue, the fisher proceeds to dismember a crab or crumble to atoms a cold potato, and therewith besprinkle the waves. It is then the fish come in their battalions. They are lugged in as fast as the arms of man and woman can. Baskets are filled; buckets, pockets, and hats even, are filled, and the food supply of some families is secure for a month to come.

Saithe,— I hear you say,— a coarse, ungainly fish. Sir, it is admitted freely. But, out of your charity, remember these things. The saithe you spurn will, in some cases, be thankfully cleaned, and salted, and dried, and will keep from many doors in Cara through a harsh winter the ghouls of starvation; in others, they will be left to rot for a day and then, as bait in lobster pots, they will allure these creatures of the sea that are so popular in yon fine London restaurants, and that bring to Cara the little welcome doles of money. Scorn not the saithe, good friend, for he is the savior of our island.

I ask you, lastly, to have a thought for the post among our institutions. The transmission of mails, I admit, is not often the inspiration of bards, and, indeed, it is not mine to sing His Majesty's Government or the Postmaster-General thereof. Angus Macvean has the monopoly of my respect and admiration. Angus is the postmaster, pier-master, ferryman, general

merchant, universal provider of Cara. When the mails come — as they do, thrice weekly — by the steamer to the pier, his office is something of a sine-cure. But there are the three other days. There are the three 'north end' days. These are the days when, in winter at least, Angus assumes the rôle of viking. His it is then to do battle with the pitiless Atlantic.

From the end of the high-road, the mail bags must be carried over the mile of rough ground that impeded the progress of me and my luggage when first I came to Cara. Then the ferry-boat is pulled out to the track of the steamer. It sounds easy. But go with Angus as I once did, study the size and solidity of the boat, test the dynamic force of those waves that roll in from the northwest, and endeavor to preserve a calm demeanor when a bulky paddle-box heaves ominously over your head. These things have I done. Therefore, I respect Angus who does them thrice weekly. Only three times this winter has he failed to bring in the newspapers and the letters that keep us in touch with the world. Wherefore I respect Angus all the more. I always have the satisfaction of feeling that the penny is well spent which is gummed to those letters that drop through the slot in his shop window.

You who have borne with my frivolities so far, must now gird your loins for a combat with some paragraphs that deal with the less tangible aspects of life in Cara. There were strange new things to be observed on the island; there are to be recorded stranger and newer processes of mind resulting from contact with the novel environment. It seems to me — egotistically, perhaps, but very poignantly — that my experiences, or the psychological results of them, have a certain bearing on post-war conditions of life. My case is typical of the war; my little

esoteric problem is one that will present itself to many others now that the war is over. I congratulate myself on having worked out its solution. Therefore, you are invited simply to bear with me a moment longer.

But, first, let me recapitulate. On August 5, 1914, Mars caught me out in the heyday of a fairly strong innings played against the examiners that guard the exclusiveness of an honorable profession. I was mobilized, trained, transhipped, landed, baptized of fire, wounded, doctored, and eventually discharged, medically unfit. These processes occupied twenty-two supremely episodic months. In the end, I was free to resume the attack on that honorable profession. The indifference of a country not too actively grateful made the earning of money a sheer necessity. I had not a reserve of strength sufficient for progress in my pre-war occupation; more important, I had not the faintest desire to return to a desk and the glaring circle of light from a student's reading lamp. Business, commerce — call it what you will — seemed to me then a loathsome business, a maculate process of money getting. If money were an essential of life, not mine to make it over Sheriff Court processes or in the musty chambers of Conveyancing Law. The idea was repulsive; actively repulsive as a pestilence. So much for the lessons learned in the University of Gallipoli.

For a year I carried on according to my altered lights. The success of the experiment was only partial. It was pleasant to know that some sort of existence could be had outside an office, but it was decidedly unpleasant to realize the editors did not yearn to read what I cared to write. The utter impossibility of freeing one's self from the economic clutch became more and more patent. (Talk of Thoreau an it please you; he lived in New England in

the nineteenth century.) There was no escaping it — parents, friends, and mere acquaintances who were willing enough to excuse you for a time as a discharged soldier, began latterly to look askance at this flat defiance of the conventions. Worldly facts crowded upon me. Hang it! There was no escaping them. I wavered; I rallied; I fell; I rose again.

But those who watched could never understand; sympathetic enough, the case was beyond them. Ask not how often I read the brave old Henley's *Invictus*. Daily perhaps; but it helped me little. At the end of my year I had nearly capitulated. Life and the good things of life I loved; they were only to be bought with money; therefore, in the conventional way, I must make money. On the very steps, as it were, of the law office, I met the good friend who spoke of Cara.

Of that island you have read some superficial particulars. You know that I looked for a cheerless islet peopled by a gloomy race, and that I found a beautiful and reasonably prosperous place, and a warm receptive people. You have learned that in Cara there are none of the diversions that seduce the dweller in cities, and that few of its inhabitants have seen a train. (One old man — he could not make himself understood in English — described the working of a threshing mill as 'hellish.' But remember the wartime worldliness of Druimachro.) In this island, then, was planted a townsman, a twentieth-century soldier. In this island, among a simple people, he has achieved a certain determination for the future; freed so far as possible from the trammels of modernism, he has come to thank God for an unconquerable soul. How it has happened he does not know, but happily and gloriously it has happened. Life for him has been reduced from a hopeless, stained

muddle to something that approaches clarity and worthiness. Even so wonderful is the effect of seeing a portion of the world and life framed by the inscrutable seal.

There is a bay at the south end of the island, named in the Gaelic tongue Grob Bagh. Among all the bays that I have seen — English, Norwegian, Egyptian, and Ægean bays — it is the most beautiful. It is at once rocky and sandy, and to screen it from the world there rises behind a fabulous amphitheatre of turf, garnished here and there with clumps of bracken that blaze in winter sunsets. Few living souls go there since few fishes go there. And I have adopted it, for its beauty and exclusiveness, as an apt confessional, a concert hall of the very finest, and a vast lecture room. Here I tell my sorrows to the sea. Here I listen to the symphonies that the Atlantic is never tired of playing. Here I deliver myself of weighty pronouncements on the art of living.

The burden of my slender philosophy concerns itself mainly with immediate things, with the manner of living an island life in time of war. I have reduced it to a formula. I know my wants, and flatter myself that these are moderate. First, naturally, I require my daily newspaper, because it tells me how fare the army and the navy in their task; as for its titbits of local news, its announcement of bargain sales, its sporting intelligence, its trivialities and sensations, the news-sheet might as well remain in the city of its origin for all that it matters to a voluntary exile. Only the main stream of war interests me now, flowing in the direction of victory or the other thing. It is pleasant to be far from the eddies. The gaunt, gray shapes that sometimes pass far out on the Atlantic, and the wreckage of vessels that is often washed ashore in Grob Bagh, bring them no

nearer; these are only reminders of the fact that one must concentrate on the main issue — on victory.

Next I ask for letters from my friends. Friends, mark you, and not the acquaintances who write for their dear convention's sake, or in the hope that a note from the city will 'cheer me up.' (As if I were a thing to be pitied — I who pity them!) It is astonishing to note how vision improves with distance. Among the great concourse of those with whom I mixed in the old days, the real friends are conspicuous in the ruck like sheep in a herd of goats. And from these friends only do I want to hear. Pray do not bore an islander with tattle of the latest engagement, the latest play, the latest rumor on the sugar exchange. It helps no one to learn that an evil-doer has broken the illuminated lamps before the Provost's house. Lucky Provost! is all I can say. Does it signify one whit that the annual meeting of the Golf Club will be held in the clubhouse some time in January? Just heavens, no! And again, no! say I who do not claim to be less trivially human than my fellows.

This, however, I do claim: that Cara has taught me to concentrate on essentials. To live decently and quietly and with some purpose is the essential thing. Why, in the name of reason, should my mental sky be clouded by aimless, futile things? They retard, merely, and it is fitting to progress toward some clarity and purpose.

I know that you are rating me for a haphazard, facile moralist. Keep at it, then; your spleen can hurt yourself alone. The five miles of sea that separate Cara from the mainland protect me from its bitterness, and I came to Cara to dodge annoyances of the kind. My experiment, let me insist, has been successful. I have avoided distractions. Perforce, I have concentrated on essen-

tials. And through this concentration are my views and purpose peacefully stable. It has been a clarification, an uplifting, a confirmation. Cara has been my second university, if Gallipoli was the first. I have forgotten all about my ills and convalescence. A treaty of peace has been signed in my mind, putting an end to civil war over

the question of the future. Now, I am agog for the day when I shall leave Cara and, following my own plan of campaign, grapple with the facts.

Before peace comes to the earth again there will be some thousands in need of spiritual spring cleaning of the kind. Let us pray devoutly that each one of them may find his proper Cara.

[*The National Review*]

## ANTHONY TROLLOPE

BY H. C. BIRON

WORK so admirable as Anthony Trollope's can never be forgotten. It is true that literary taste is apt to be capricious, and no author is safe from temporary neglect. There have been times when superior people refused to read Dickens, and some moderns pretend they do not like Thackeray. Intolerant youth turns to strange gods, and the destruction of old faiths is part of the ritual. As regards the general public, appreciation seems to vary inversely with its atmospheric surroundings. Did not Archdeacon Grantley lock himself into his study in Barchester Close to read Rabelais? As Mr. Birrell says in his delightful essay on 'The Office of Literature,' 'Self-forgetfulness is the essence of enjoyment.' Cinderella appeals to the drudge for whom the fairy godmother never calls. One suspects that when she did and Cinderella landed her Prince, the story lost much of its savor for the royal bride.

Stories of the sea make their appeal principally to land-lubbers, the mariner preferring the detective stories of terra

firma, while novels of passion, we are given to understand, are composed for the most part by elderly governesses for coeval spinsters. So in the comparative calm of the nineties the feeling was for romance. The quiet sanity of Trollope's method made little appeal, and for the moment Barchester ceased to be a home county. With the strain of war people found distraction in more placid literature. 'Trollope's top-hole!' a soldier wrote from the trenches, 'particularly when you have just come out of the line and wish to delete everything from your memory as cleanly as the censor deletes injudicious remarks in your correspondence.'

Trollope's autobiography, published soon after his death, without doubt damaged his reputation for the moment. It was written with the fulfilled intention that it should not be published during his lifetime. This enabled him to write with a freedom which makes the book of unique interest; but at the time it did the author harm. The public found this picture of an author in undress somewhat disillusioning.