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The Age of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties, 1919–1940

Ronald Blythe

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The Age of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties, 1919–1940 Ronald Blythe
In this brilliant reconstruction of life in England between the two world wars, Ronald Blythe highlights a number of key episodes and personalities which typify the flavour of those two extraordinary decades. He begins with the burial in Westminster Abbey of the Unknown Soldier. This was nearly two years after the last shot had been fired in battle and the near-delirium of 1919 - a boom year though few families were out of mourning - was giving way to the uneasy realization that the world was still far from being a place fit for heroes to live in. The period abounded with colourful figures whose idiosyncrasies Ronald Blythe relishes. The absurd Joynson-Hicks cleaning up London's morals while defending General Dyer shooting down nearly 400 Indians at Amritsar; Mrs Meyrick, the night-club queen of London, being regularly raided at the famous '43'; John Reith putting the B. B.C. on its feet and the public in its place; and headline stealers such as Amy Johnson and T. E. Lawrence. Behind this garish facade, the author shows the new writers emerging at the turn of the decade from their embarrassingly middle-class backgrounds and traces the birth of Britain's first radical intelligentsia. The popular front, the cartoonist David Low's "Colonel Blimp" and the Left Book Club characterise the much-changed political climate of the 1930s. There, dealing with Jarrow, the Spanish Civil War and Munich, Ronald Blythe show his capacity for writing with an urgency no less effective for its restraint. Coupled with the delightful astringency he brings to such rather less weighty matters as the Brighton trunk murders and the Rector of Stiffkey's remarkable capers, Ronald Blythe demonstrated in this early book his impressive gifts as a social historian.

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