The news that Feliks Topolski has returned from another trip abroad never fails to create a stir among the British public. The thirty-eight-year-old Polish artist who migrated to London in 1935 has won for himself a unique reputation as the most observant illustrator our age has produced. Beginning life as a political caricaturist in Poland, he quickly brought his talents to bear on the picturesque scene of peace-time England. His strutting guardsmen, his dandified charabanc, his swirling figures overshadowed by the solemn architecture of the metropolis epitomised the grandeur and self-assurance of British traditions.

It was not strange that a link should spring up between the satirical draughtsman and the master of literary irony, Bernard Shaw. As an illustrator of Shaw's plays, Topolski had no difficulty in catching the author's characteristic tone of witty sarcasm. In his drawings for Geneva, the characters, thinly disguised figures from the living stage, are represented with all the elegant fatuity which the great mocker himself had in mind.

Up till the war Topolski's art remained brilliant but detached. It took the impact of death and destruction to hurl him into the arena. His true greatness was revealed at the time of the Battle of Britain when his tireless pencil began describing the horror of scenes in bombarded London. Passing from the study of the individual to the genre picture, he portrayed the grim desolation of the East End, the nightmare of burning docks, the huddled figures of men battling against a giant catastrophe. Blown up and injured himself, he became absorbed in the passionate spectacle in which his own role was as much that of an actor as of an observer.

The chronicler of the London epic was soon to witness the war on other fronts. In the autumn of 1941 he travelled to Russia as member of a Polish Diplomatic Mission, and, on his return, published a book of trenchant illustrations entitled Russia in War. Here was the first authentic portrayal of Britain's new ally facing invasion. The endlessness of Russia with its columns of tanks and marching men, the resolute endurance on the faces of its peasant soldiery, the ungainly impetus of its cavalry racing to the front, all these were expressed with a magnificent economy of line and wash.

Later on Topolski embarked on another journey which was to take him farther afield. He went to China, Burma and India, made a rapid tour of the Middle East, visited parts of Africa and witnessed a stage of the Italian campaign. The end of the war found him in Germany, picturing the last phase of the Allied advance and the German rout. Prolifer to the extreme, he jotted down lightning sketches, took notes or engraved scenes in his mem-