

THREE BOOKS OF THE MONTH

I

HAPGOOD'S "AN ANARCHIST WOMAN"*

They seem very actual, the characters in this book, and if they never, precisely, existed outside the author's mind it is a mere oversight of nature which she will presently amend. There is no reason why a girl of the slums should not be just such a combination of Marie Bashkirtseff, Manon Lescaut, Hedda Gabler and Helene von Dönniges—to take at random a few of her literary forebears. Her mother was half-German, half-French, often hysterical; her father a German machinist generally drunk. Sensuality, neurasthenia, a potential talent too weak to work, insatiable egoism given to what may be called auto-poetry or self-crooning (private lyrics of one's peculiar soul not necessarily musical but imagining a very musical applause), and above all much hit-or-miss reading of writings reputed extreme—and you have Marie the heroine, or, rather, a considerable part of her, for she is too good a literary or natural product to equal any such bare list of qualities. One thing she certainly is not and that is a mere "anarchist woman," and Mr. Hapgood does the book some injustice in his preface when he says:

It represents an effort to throw light on what may be called the temperament of revolt; by portraying the mental life of an individual, and incidentally of more than one individual, I have hoped to make more clear the natural history of the anarchist; to show under what conditions, in connection with what personal qualities, the anarchistic habit of mind arises, and to point out, suggestively, rather than explicitly, the nature, the value, and the tragic limitation of the social rebel.

Marie's relations with the anarchist movement were incidental. Any excitable artistic male might have done as much for her soul as the anarchist dreamer Terry with whom she fell in

love. "Social rebel" is too narrow a term for such an epicure of emotion. Humdrum was the enemy, not "society." When anarchism became humdrum, she took to the woods—went into a camp in California, where Mr. Hapgood finally leaves her, "making a last effort to live the straight free life of Nature's children, a suckling at the breasts of Mother Earth." A new birth, he calls it, and quotes her:

I have been here now a whole month and have not wearied of it for a moment. Each day brings a new, wonderful experience; and each day I feel a real part of the great wonderful scheme of things. Indeed, I am becoming a part of Nature.

A new appetiser, the reader says, and wonders how the feelings are to be scraped up for next month, though quite sure that she will get them somehow. Mr. Hapgood seems blind to the amount of yeast he has put in her. He seems not to know that she is blessed with enough power of self-dramatisation to last a lifetime. She will not stay long with Professor Henry Van Dyke and Nature—small blame to her, for far less restless souls than hers have fretted under that compulsion. Despite his air of finality and moral approval Mr. Hapgood leaves Marie in what is really the shortest of her moods. He tries to prove his point by her, but she becomes too real a person to stay inside his proposition. That is the danger to the thesis-writer of drawing a character too well; it walks off on its own feet, snapping its fingers at the author's educational intentions.

Terry seems more exclusively the product of books.

Terry is a perfect type of the idealist. We shall see how, in the midst of what the world calls immorality and sordidness, this quality in him was ever present; even when it led to harshness to persons or facts. Not fitting into the world, his attitude toward it, his actions in it, and his judgment of it are keen and impassioned, but, not fitting the actual facts, sometimes unjust and cruel. Tender and sensitive

*An Anarchist Woman. By Hutchins Hapgood. New York: Duffield and Company, 308 pp.

as a child, his indignation is so uncompromising that it often involves injustice and wrong.

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This was the man who met Marie at a critical time of her life. He was about thirty-five years old, had experienced much, had become formed, had rejected society, but not the ideal. Rather, as he dropped the one, he embraced more fervently the other. He had consorted with thieves, prostitutes, with all low human types; and for their failures and their weaknesses, their ideas and their instincts, he felt deep sympathy and even an æsthetic appreciation.

Terry is made most ingeniously to talk out of books:

Whenever and wherever I have touched the depths, and it has been frequent and prolonged, and have seen the proletarian face to face, naked spiritually and physically, the appeal in his eyes is irresistible and irrefutable. I must do something for him or else I am lost to myself. If I should ever let an occasion go by I am sure I never could recover from the feeling that something irreparable had happened to me. I should not mind failure, but to fail here and in my own eyes is to be forever lost and eternally damned. This looks like the religion of my youth under another guise, but I must find imperishable harmony somewhere. The apathy of the mass oppresses me into a hopeless helplessness which may account for my stagnation, my ineffectiveness, my impotence, my stupidity, my crudeness, my despair. I have always felt lop-sided, physically, especially in youth. My awkwardness became, too, a state of mind at the mercy of any spark of suggestion. My subjectively big head I tried to compress into a little hat, my objectively large hands concealed themselves in subjective pockets, my poor generous feet went the way of the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. The result is a lop-sided mind, developed monstrosously in certain sensitive directions, otherwise not at all. A born stumbler in this world, I naturally lurched up against society—but, as often happens, I have lost the thread of my thought: my thoughts, at the critical moment, frequently desert me as my family did; they seem to carry on an alluring flirtation, and when I think them near they suddenly wave me from the distance. But like a lover, I will follow on—follow on to platonic intercourse with my real mistress, the proletarian. And soul there is there. I have met as fathom-

less spirits among the workers as one will meet with anywhere. Art never has fathomed them, and may never be able to do so. Often have I stood dumbfounded before some simple day-labourer with whom I worked. Art does not affect me as this kind of grand simplicity in life does. I keep muttering to myself: there must be a meaning to our lives somewhere, or else we must sunder this social fabrication and create a meaning; and so my incantations go on endlessly.

Sometimes it is the voice of literary youth, or of any man in a radical mood, called "modern" by reviewers who pretend not to know that radicalism is a ratio, not a creed, and may have been a constant ratio, for aught we know, since the first hot-headed anti-cannibal turned against the table manners of the contemporary leading families.

"It takes recklessness," says Terry, "to be a social experimentalist or really to get into touch with humanity. Our careful humanitarians, our charitable ones, never do, for they stick to their conservatism. How we do fashion our own fetters, from chains to corsets, and from gods to governments. Oh, how I wish I were a fine lean satirist!—with a great black-snake whip of sarcasm to scourge the smug and genial ones, the self-righteous, charitable, and respectable ones! How I would lay the lash on corpulent content and fat faith with folds in its belly, chin and hands; those who try to beat their breast-bone through layers of fat! Oh, this rotund reverence of morality! 'Meagre minds,' mutters George Moore, and my gorge rises in stuttering rage to get action on them. Verily such morality as your ordinary conservative professes has an organic basis: it has its seat in those vestiges of muscles that would still wag our abortive tails and often do wag our abortive tongues. To arouse such fat ones to any onward flight it may take the tremendous impact of a revolution. It may take many upheavals of the seismic soul of man before the hobgoblins of authority are finally laid in the valley.

"How many free spirits have been caught and hampered in the quagmire of conservatism. Yet they have the homing instinct of all winged things: they return to the soul and seek to throw off the fat and heavy flesh of social stupidity. Many great, free spirits there have been who possess this orientation of the

race and have brought us tidings of the promised land. How many thundering spirits have commanded us to march by the tongued and livid lightning of their prophetic souls, but how few of us have done so! Why, to me, this world is a halting hell of hitching-posts and of truculent troughs for belching swine-herds. The universe has no goal that we know of, unless Eternity be the aim; let us then have the modesty of the Cosmos, and no other modesty, and be content to know our course, and be sure to run it."

Terry was the slave of the principle no work without inspiration, and tramped and hoboed and starved rather than turn his hand to any task that seemed for the moment disagreeable. The disagreeableness of the task was proof to Terry that it went against the freedom of his nature, was a form of social coercion to which he as anarchist must rise superior. To work for wages was to approve the system of exploitation. To work for applause was also base. One cannot be quite sure of one's motives. He must wait for a work impulse that should be self-evidently untrammelled and unalloyed, an autogenetic impulse, a sort of moral seizure; then the mind might work with anarchistic propriety, work because it really wished to, voluntarily up and dance, or be bowled along the line of no resistance. But there are often long intervals between these happy turns, for there is treason within us from the anarchistic point of view. The mind is already compromised; the thoughts are by no means free (some of them snub others); the reason is often browbeaten, and sneaking little conventionalities start up every moment and run the intellect in their own way; clearly the mind has been altogether overrun by "society," the enemy. Hence waiting around for pure ego-work to begin, soul cries, self-outbursts, is apt to run to very long pauses indeed, for the harder one looks inside his head the more entangled it seems with "society." And as the muscles need the pressure of objects that resist, a mind thus denied all exercise is apt to become at first flaccid and short of breath, and then, a mere pendulous, foolish thing awaiting justification by galvanism. So Terry ran his course. He was

very logical. He applied the principles of anarchism to his own mind, and with entire consistency in freedom's cause let it go to pieces.

The aloofness of the Overman, the individualistic teachings of Zarathustra, appealed to the anti-social Terry, to the man who more and more went back to his egotistic personality, to whom more and more the "communist" Christian anarchists made little appeal, who more and more became what is called an individual anarchist, with whom there is little possibility of relationship. . . .

In the latest word which Mr. Hapgood says he has from Terry occurs this confession:

I had to seek surcease in my old remedy of hasheesh and chloroform, which was a change from suffering to stupidity. But I shall not swell the cosmic chorus of woe by raising my cracked voice against impending fate. I am more and more alone, more and more conscious of a growing something that is keeping me apart from all whom I can possibly avoid.

This, says Mr. Hapgood, marks the near approach of Terry's logical end.

Under Terry's teaching, and it was all she had, Marie discovered other desires than the sexual, though still free to roam with other men as she would, for Terry believed in "free love." And here a warning to a certain class whom Mr. Hapgood, rather hopelessly, I think, attempts to reassure. If you agree with Mr. William Winter's criticism of Ibsen or approve the policy of Anthony Comstock toward Bernard Shaw, this is no fit book for you to read. Marie's relations with men are mentioned. They are not told in the amatory spirit of the Dido episode which your children read in school or with the carnal revelry of *Romeo and Juliet*; but they are mentioned. The terms "unpleasant," "malodorous," bound to occur in some reviews, are all implied in the title, for anarchism includes "free-love." There is no knowing the American caprice of expurgation, and the only safe course for a Wintry-Comstock mind is to stay on the pure side of the definition and try not to understand.

They were indeed all "free lovers," and quite naturally so; the rebellious temperament

instinctively takes as its object of attack the strongest convention in society. Anarchism in Europe is mainly political; in America it is mainly sexual; for the reason that there is less freedom of expression about sex in America than in Europe: so there is a stronger protest here against the conventions in this field—as the yoke is more severely felt. While I was in Italy and France I met a number of anarchists who, on the sex side, were not ostentatiously rebellious. They were like the free sort of conservative people everywhere. But in political ideas they were more logical, sophisticated, and deeply revolutionary than is the case with the American anarchists, who on the other hand both in their lives and their opinions, are extreme rebels against sex conventions. It is only another instance of how unreason in one extreme tends to bring about unreason in the other. Our prudishness, hypocrisy and stupid conventionality in all sex matters is responsible for the unbalanced license of many a protesting spirit.

In Terry's company Marie plunged into indiscriminate reading of the brilliant writers of the time, some with wings, some with dubious flying machines of their own devising, but all essaying an upward and forward motion, skippers of tradition, and if not pioneers, at least fugitives from commonplace. She brought to them a mind without previous acquisitions and an experience almost exclusively physiological. So she became, like certain insurgent magazine verses, extremely vague as to the identity of her oppressors, sure only of her revolt. She quivered as she read like an unballasted reviewer afloat in some teapot tempest of "strong" writing, in a Jack London gale, for example, with the words "primal" and "elemental" tearing through the shrouds. "Cosmos" and "cosmic," as Terry used them, would at times delightfully capsize her. She began her thinking in terms of enormous girth and unapprehended content. Her first ghost stories were of "society." She had a woman's very personal way with large abstractions, making enemies or pets of them, like the woman quoted by Professor James: "I do so love to cuddle up to God." She acquired that precocity of literary feeling which prompts to "confessions" in advance of think-

ing, and you will find her likeness in a great deal of the premature poetry of the present, written in a flutter of expectation over an idea that does not come. No plodding for her. "Small hath continual plodding ever won, save base authority from others' books." But occasional plodding is necessary even for the epicure of emotions, to get up an appetite for the next sudden revelation. She read for the pleasure of feeling the thought jump, but without the acquisition of a good deal of dense traditional stuff there is nothing for the thought to jump from or over. Where is the fun in seeing Bernard Shaw knock ideas down if one has not first met them standing up? Apart from any question of truth, or character, or the "meaning of life," and merely from the point of view of sportsmanship, the mind needs its level expanses, studious trifles, sleepy acquisitions, stupid details, traditional irrelevancies, statistics, tariff discussions, polite conversation, leading articles and mild ambling poetry, including many hymns—in short, must plod along rather diligently at intervals for a due sense of the length, breadth, thickness and perfect humanity of platitude, from which alone the rocketing may be enjoyed. Otherwise these hop-skip-and-jump fellows will seem pioneers from nowhere or insurgents against nothing in general. Even as mere pleasure-givers they will pall, if one does not retain some laborious habits, remain something of a scholar in commonplace things. Marie wanted the emotions without gathering any material for them to act upon.

She lacked, therefore, the staying power necessary even to successful hedonism, could not stand the training, the abstinence, the exercise. One sees signs of her in all classes, not merely in the slums, not necessarily versed in anarchism, mentionable or unmentionable. The most of her will perhaps be found in literary Arcadias, where, as they will tell you, they have "good talk." But she pricks the mind to seeking analogies in very respectable quarters, which must not be mentioned lest they seem far-fetched, or violate a confidence, or provoke a libel-suit. It is proof of some power in a book if it sets one to spec-

ulating in this way, hunting analogies, exceeding the author's apparent design, and interviewing the characters on one's own account. The pleasant clever novels of the day leave no such illusion that the characters gave got away, and give no such impulse to a wild-geese chase. It is a strange man that could remain awake five minutes beyond his usual time with the characters of Messrs. Harding Davis, Booth Tarkington, O. Henry, or even Anthony Hope, Maurice Hewlett, and stars of a greater magnitude. Gone like a glass of soda water; cheerful but done with; ancient after two ticks of the clock, hazy as Tiglath-Pileser; and the soul now ready to be completely absorbed in the deeds of the flies on the window pane. It must be that Mr. Hapgood has written an unusual book. It might be an altogether admirable one, but Mr. Hapgood is more credulous of his people than he has a right to be of any one, even of himself. They are subjects for sympathetic derision—not satire the sneering substance that we know, but satire that includes the satirist himself. That is the grave omission of the satirist, the omission of himself—nearly all the world to the literary person, yet left out of the world in almost every extremely sarcastic survey of it. There can, of course, be no sound derision of things *sub specie eternitatis* that does not include the derider himself.

F. M. Colby.

II

ROSE O'NEILL'S "THE LADY IN THE WHITE VEIL"

The author of this novel is known as an illustrator of considerable merit, an artist of a certain originality and force. There are several specimens of her handiwork scattered throughout the pages, which are not unpleasing. Now, it is but a jealous carping criticism that would deny to the successful achiever in one line of artistic endeavour,—because of success—the right to achievement in some other line of work. Indeed it would have been,—for the present reviewer at least,

*The Lady in the White Veil. By Rose O'Neill. New York: Harper and Brothers.

—a pleasure to be able to announce that Mrs. Rose O'Neill is as clever a writer as she is an illustrator. But this cannot be said. In fact it must be regretfully stated that she has written a very poor book. It is quite impossible to discover why such a book should have been written at all. For the author's time and coffers could presumably have been filled to so much better advantage by the exercise of her real talent. The story of the novel hinges about a mystery which becomes so obvious about one-third through the book that the snarl of so-called mystifying happenings becomes annoying in the extreme. The style is overlaid with a would-be facetiousness and attempted brilliancy which read like the efforts of a capable high-school girl who has not—perhaps never will,—learned the beauty of simplicity, nor the power to understand life from anything but the school-girl attitude.

One oasis in a desert of mannerisms and useless words is the figure of Uncle Dodson, the violin-playing amateur detective. Uncle Dodson is really delightful. He is the only justification for an otherwise unnecessary book. He is so good that we fancy the author must have forgotten her literary ambitions for the time, and simply painted a figure from life.

Uncle Dodson's sayings are most amusing, and give the only really funny moments among 'so much that is painfully trying to be funny.

Insects are not necessarily celibates.

Or:

To a man of a lofty nature a noble purpose cannot be forgotten. It inspires all the divine energies of his soul: all the strength of his spirit reaches out: he sits down on it, like a bull-pup on an old overshoe—if you know what I mean.

This is a sample of Uncle Dodson's conversation. If the delightful old gentleman was the reason for writing the book—there is no other apparent—it could have been done much easier. He is of himself so much worth while that we regret it has not been done in any other way.

Grace Isabel Colbron.